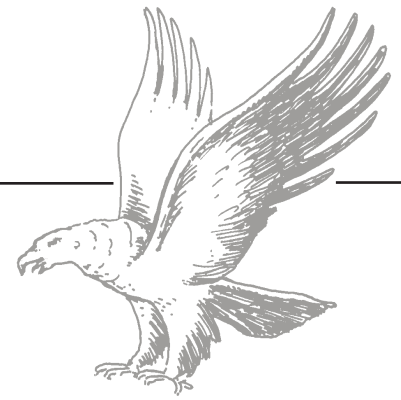


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



January 17, 2016

Optimism

Optimists are often accused of having an unrealistic outlook on life. On the contrary, optimists have the most realistic outlook of all—because they see something the rest of us don't.

“Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, ‘Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it’” (Num. 13:30).

“The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, ‘a land which flows with milk and honey.’ Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them” (Num. 14:7-9).

We think of optimists as people who breeze through life with a perpetual smile on their face and cheerful words on their lips. They are always happy! happy! happy!—even when the wheels are falling off. But the story of Caleb and Joshua at Kadesh Barnea reveals another, more realistic, version of optimism that we should study.

First, consider that these men were not unaware of the gravity of the threats they faced. The cities of Canaan were indeed strong and fortified, and their

inhabitants were powerful. Victory was possible, but they knew it would require a difficult military campaign to achieve it. They may have been optimistic, but they were not blind to the grim reality of the struggle that lay before them.

Second, they maintained this optimism in the face of overwhelming negativity from their own countrymen. They were threatened with stoning for even voicing their opinion (14:10). Their contrarian position was anything but happy. It put their lives in jeopardy. The easier path would have been to abandon their confidence and join the mob in complaining about the unfairness of it all.

Finally, their positive outlook was not rooted in their own power, nor in a Pollyannish belief that somehow everything would turn out okay, but in a conviction that God had already promised them victory and would deliver. The final outcome was in God's capable hands, and there was no doubt in their minds how everything would turn out—if the Israelites would only trust Him.

Of course, that proved to be the stumbling block here. Other than Caleb

and Joshua, the Israelites did not believe God would overcome the challenges that faced them. People who do not believe they can win, generally don't.

The story of Caleb and Joshua's stubborn optimism offers a lesson for Christians today. We are to be a joyful people, not given to complaining or grumbling (Phil. 4:4; 2:14). But that joy is grounded in a firm grasp of reality. *We know* that life is tough and fraught with challenges. *We know* our own limitations and inadequacies. *We know* that even our closest friends can be agents of misery and depression. Our positive outlook on life does not ignore those realities. We are optimistic because *we know* that none of these obstacles can prevent God from delivering on His promises.

This world is designed to beat us down and destroy our confidence. The optimist is not indifferent to that fact. But unlike most everyone else, the optimist sees life from a higher vantage point. We know there is a divine plan in motion that will someday sweep away all the garbage and restore paradise. How can we *not* be happy?

– David King