

DARING TO BE DIFFERENT

by Ray C. Stedman

I would like to speak to you about daughters. I am regarded as somewhat of an expert in this field, having four daughters of my own. But I want to speak about daring daughters. This is not a revelation of family secrets, nor have I been pressured for equal time by my family. I simply wish to comment on a passage that deals with five daughters of a man named Zelophehad, and thus to learn lessons from the heroines of faith of the Bible.

For a man to have five daughters surely qualifies him as a hero of faith, but it is not the man we shall focus on but his daughters. The Word of God does not only present certain men as heroes and leaders of faith, but women as well. In Christ there is neither male nor female, no respect of persons and thus it is equally as possible for a woman to be a warrior of the cross, a conqueror in Christ as any man. We often focus upon the Moseses, the Daniels, the Davids, and Pauls of Scripture, but we need to remember as well the Ruths, the Deborahs, the Hannahs, the Marys, and the Dorcas; these godly noble women whose lives are models of faith.

In Numbers 27 we meet the five daughters of Zelophehad. They are introduced to us in the first four verses:

Then drew near [to Moses] the daughters of Zelophehad, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph. The names of his daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, at the door of the tent of meeting, saying, "Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the Lord in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from his family, because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brethren." {Num 27:1-4 RSV}

There are only two incidents recorded of the decisions which Moses made about civil and family affairs in the governing of the children of Israel as they came out of Canaan. This is one of them, and the other also is connected with the daughters of Zelophehad, found in Chapter 36 of Numbers. It is interesting that these five girls are singled out as an example from many incidents unrecorded on the pages of Scripture.

The time of this incident occurred during the wilderness journey, as Israel was coming out of Egypt into the land of Canaan. They were nearing the time of entrance into the land. Moses was now a very old man. He had led the Israelites for forty years of wilderness wanderings. All those who had left the land of Egypt had died, except for Joshua, Caleb and Moses. A whole new generation had arisen and were about to enter the land. They were now anticipating the dividing up of the land. It has always been a thrilling thing to me to see how these people were so confident that God would fulfill his promise of giving them the land that even before they entered it they divided it up among the tribes. That is an example of faith.

In the midst of this division of the land by lots there came to Moses these five daughters of Zelophehad. We learn that their father had died in the wilderness wanderings. There is no mention at all of their mother, so it seems clear that these five girls were left as orphans when their father died. They are disturbed about their threatened loss of inheritance. One other thing is indicated by their names. They come from a very godly family, for you will notice that in each of these names is the syllable "ah." When that appears in a biblical name it is almost always a contraction for the name "Jehovah," the Lord God. So each of these girls had in her name the name of Jehovah which were surely representative of the faith of this family. The name Zelophehad is interesting too. It means, "protection against fear." What is protection against fear? There is only one thing -- faith. Faith is the opposite of fear. Faith is the conqueror of fear. Whenever you are plagued with fears of any kind the answer to them is faith. This is why Jesus said to his disciples again and again, "Fear not, but believe." Faith conquers fear. So it is apparent that these girls had been trained in the matters of faith and had

come from a godly family.

Throughout this passage faith is a keynote, as it is in any age. Faith is the keynote to blessing, the watchword of blessing. No matter whether it is the 1st century or the 20th, "without faith," says the Scriptures "it is impossible to please God," {Heb 11:6 NIV}. This needs to be emphasized today for I find many people who have a struggle with this. Many call me up in the middle of the night to tell me they have difficulty exercising faith for the problems they are going through. They can exercise faith when it has to do with a biblical story. They believe in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews and that faith conquers many things, as in the record there. They can believe that God responds to faith on behalf of certain outstanding religious leaders of our day, as Billy Graham and others. But many of you are having great difficulty in believing that God will work in *your* situation and that he will do something for *you* .

But that is what faith is. It is an expectation that God is going to do something for you. It is a belief that God has promised to do something, and that he will follow through. That is what faith is. There is a wonderful acronym built on that word:

F: Forsaking
A: All
I: I
T: Trust
H: Him

That is faith, isn't it? Forsaking all else (i.e. not looking to any other resource, not depending on something human), but Forsaking All, I Trust Him. That is the keynote of this incident taken from the book of Numbers.

Look at it a little more closely: In the first place there is manifest here the first stage of faith: Determination. Here were these girls facing the problem of the possible loss of their inheritance. The family had been promised a part in the land that lay before them, flowing with milk and honey. Many times through that wilderness journey they had anticipated what their portion of the land would be like. They wondered where they would be and what God had hidden away for them in the land of promise. Yet it looks now as though they have lost all this. When their father died their inheritance seemingly vanished with him.

We know now that these Old Testament stories, occurring as they did in actual history, are also pictures designed to illustrate for us helpful truth for our own spiritual pilgrimage. As the land of Canaan was before these Israelites as a goal to be sought and a land to be entered, so God has before us a land of promise. It is the promise of power, blessing, refreshing, and fruitfulness in the Christian life. It is maturity, if you like. Wholeness is another term for it. It is the promise of becoming the kind of people we long to be, of finding the inner resources and strength that will enable us to cope with life. These are all pictured by the fruitful land of Canaan. Remember that Paul said, "Thanks be unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus," {cf, Eph 1:3 KJV}. That is our land of Canaan. Peter says, "His divine power has granted unto you all things pertaining to life and godliness," {cf, 2 Pet 1:3}. Everything you need -- that is your land of Canaan.

It is absolutely imperative that Christians determine to possess this. God does not force his blessings upon us. Many young Christians, particularly, make a mistake in this regard. They think that having received the Lord Jesus Christ that everything they need is going to come automatically pouring in whether they want it or not. But that is not true. If you do not want what God wants to give, he will not force it upon you. If you do not take what God offers you, you will never have it. Therefore faith is particularly manifested by this quality of determination, a determination to have what God wants to give. Someone has well said,

"We now have as much of God's blessing as we want."

Let that sink in for a minute. You are now living at the level of spiritual victory you have decided to live at because you don't want more. If you are ever going to have more of the fullness of God's blessing you must awaken a desire for it within yourself. You must want what God wants. You must determine to have it. You are as victorious as you wish to be. The limits are never on God's side, they are always on ours. Every

doorway into blessing is framed with the words, "He who hungers and thirsts after righteousness shall be filled," {cf, Matt 5:6}.

Now look at these girls and the determination they manifest. It is a determination that exists despite discouragement. It looked as though they had lost everything they had hoped for. Their father had died and there was no male heir. By custom throughout that whole Middle East region, only males could inherit property. It looked like a lost cause. But something made these girls hope that things could be different. What do you think it was? I like to exercise what I call "sanctified imagination." I can imagine these girls getting together after the death of their father and talking it all over. After all, that would surely be a woman's approach to the problem, wouldn't it? As they talked among themselves, they began to realize something. Probably they noticed one important factor about this promise of the land -- that it was not according to merit but according to grace, that God was not asking the Israelites to earn the land of Canaan, but he was giving it to them. It did not depend on how hard they worked or how many battles they fought, but rather upon the grace of God that would make it available to them. These girls had been raised in a home that understood faith and grace and other such terms, and as they thought about these things they said to one another. "Look, perhaps all is not lost. After all, if this is a matter of grace and not of Law, then let us remember that grace can give what Law cannot. Perhaps, if we ask, God has already made provision for a situation like ours. There's nothing revealed that is against it, and, perhaps, in grace, God has found a way to supply what we lack." That is faith. I like that.

That is exactly in line with the promises of the New Testament. Remember that great promise in Romans 8:32 {KJV}: "He who spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" That is grace. We are encouraged by promises like that in Hebrews. "We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in every point like as we are," {cf, Heb 4:15 KJV}. He knows the feelings that oppress us and possess us. "Let us therefore come boldly before the throne of grace to find help in time of need," {Heb 4:16 KJV}. Surely one of the reasons we are so poverty-stricken today is because we have lost a concept of the greatness of God's grace, and his willingness to give us all things that we need. I wish I could drive that home in words of thunder, for I find it is difficult to get people to believe this. But God means it. He will give you what you need. Not what you want, or even what you think you need, but an actual need he will not deny. He says that and he means it, as much today as at any other time. These girls laid hold of the possibilities of grace and they came.

They manifested their determination despite delay, as well. Here is where most of us fail. It is not difficult to work up faith in a service like this. If we consider the examples of men and women of faith, they often capture our hearts and move our wills, and we find ourselves responding in faith to the greatness of God. We then present ourselves to God, and ask him to do something, but nothing happens. After a week or so we are right back in discouragement, where we were before. What is the problem? It is that we have not yet understood the testing of God's delay. These girls did not get what they wanted when they came to Moses. He did not give them an inheritance in the land; he gave them only a promise of an inheritance in the land, that is all. They had to wait, and wait, and wait, for the actual inheritance. That is what God oftentimes does to us because he intends to teach us by delay.

Let me share with you words that have been a help to my own heart, from the pen of F. B. Meyer:

So often we mistake God and interpret his delays as denials. What a chapter might be written of God's delays. It is the mystery of the art of educating human spirits to the finest temper of which they are capable. What searchings of heart, what analyzing of motives, what testings of the word of God, what upliftings of the soul -- searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of God signifies! All these are associated with these weary days of waiting, which are, nevertheless, big with spiritual destiny. But such delays are not God's final answer to the soul that trusts him.

When these girls came to Moses, they came with the determination to have the promise, trusting in God's grace, and they did it despite discouragement and delay.

Following determination there is immediately evident a second characteristic of faith. That second characteristic is found in Verse 2.

And they stood before Moses, and before Eliazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, at the door of the tent of meeting, {Num 27:2 RSV}

Judging from the census that had just been taken (Chapter 26, Verse 51), you will note that the number of the people of Israel was 601,730. But that included only the men; women and children were not included. It is before this entire congregation of over a million that these five girls came. I submit that *that* is a daring thing. I have seen strong men stand on this platform and face a congregation like this, and watched their faces grow pale and their knees begin to knock. They are so afraid that sometimes they have difficulty speaking. That's the fearsome sight that I look at every Sunday morning! But to one unaccustomed to it, it is indeed a fearsome thing. Imagine five girls, who never before have faced a congregation like this, coming up before 601,730 men and an uncounted number of others and voicing this kind of request. Surely that exemplifies something of the daring of faith. These girls were determined to have the inheritance God had promised, and they dared to make it known.

But there stood in their way the most powerful obstacle to advance ever known, one of Satan's favorite weapons was opposing them in this request: It was the power and force of tradition. More wholesome projects have foundered on the phrase, "We've never done this before," than on any other thing. More wonderful attempts have been squelched, thwarted, or quenched by somebody saying, "We just don't do that here," than anything else. These girls were facing that kind of problem. Thomas Dixon once said,

Tradition was the most constant, the most persistent, the most dogged, the most utterly devilish opposition Jesus ever encountered. It openly attacked him on every hand, and silently repulsed his teaching. Even the Samaritan woman he finds armed with the ancestral bludgeon. "Art thou greater than our father, Jacob?" "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain." Without departure from customs there could have been no Christian church. The great soul-winners of the past had to shake off the shackles of over-conservatism in methods (witness Melancthon, Wesley, Edwards, Finney). The church grows by iconoclasm. Its first work is to set abide false gods.

That is why I chose this passage today. The crying need of the hour is to awaken Christians to the fact that they must not be content with the status quo. The status quo is always satanic. It is the world's idea of the way things ought to be. But, as the Bible tells us continually, the world's thinking is satanically influenced and therefore it is frequently wrong. Christians are to be against the status quo and not like those who sing, "Come weal or woe, our status is quo." No, no! Christians are called to be revolutionaries, in a right sense; not lawless but "enlawed to Christ," as Paul puts it. Not against the laws of men or of the state, not rebels, but marching according to a different drumbeat. They must be moving out against the trend of the times, and forsaking customs when they contradict or counteract the moving of the Spirit of God.

That is the perfectly delightful thing about these girls. They dared to challenge a tradition that was entrenched in Israel. There was no law that denied them their inheritance, but custom was against it. When a good idea is first propounded, most people say, "It's not true." Then when its truth is proven beyond doubt, they say, "It won't work." After its workability has been demonstrated, they say, "It's not important." But when you show that it is indeed important, then they say, "We knew it all the time." Such is the entrenched power of tradition.

But now these girls are reckoning on a promise which is based on grace, so they dared to come before Moses. I would have liked to have seen Moses' face when these five girls stood up. He must have been rather nonplused. He was used to solving problems among this murmuring people, but this one must have floored him. They asked to be given an inheritance as daughters of Zelophehad, when they came into the land, and Moses did not know what to say. But he did the wise thing, he took it to the Lord, and his answer came from God. Their daring request moved him, for there is never faith without venturing. You must leave the crowd, you must leave the gang or the herd, and step out on a divine possibility before you have exercised faith. That is why faith is so liberating. That is why those who choose to live and walk by faith in what God has said always find themselves out beyond the limits of man's control. They are enslaved to no man. They are free to do what God wants them to do. That is real liberty. Don't you believe the lies that are being told you that if you become a Christian you'll become a slave, limited, narrow, never having any enjoyment of life. That is a lie right out of the pit. It is completely false. It is daring to walk out on the promises of God that makes a man free, or makes him able to discover the fullness of life God has available for us.

One last thing about this: These five girls manifest not only the determination of faith, and the daring of it, but also its reproductive quality.

Moses brought their case before the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, "The daughters of Zelophehad are right; you shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them. And you shall say to the people of Israel, 'If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it. And it shall be to the people of Israel a statute and ordinance, as the Lord commanded Moses.'" {Num 27:5-11 RSV}

Not only did these girls receive their inheritance themselves, but they began a whole series of similar reactions. This became the basis of a new principle, and a new law, in Israel.

Back in Montana, where I was raised, we had a big can of baking powder that sat on the shelf. I don't know why it has stuck with me, but the label on that can had, in big letters across it, the words: Double-Acting Baking Powder. That is what faith is like. It is double-acting. It not only acts in you, but it acts in others, it stimulates others. This is why Jesus said that faith, if it is only as big as a grain of mustard seed, is enough to do whatever needs to be done, even to moving mountains {cf, Matt 17:20}.

Why did Jesus choose that seed? -- because a grain of mustard seed has two qualities about it:

1. First, it is a seed, therefore has the ability to grow, to increase. The more you exercise faith, the more faith you will have to exercise. That is a consistent promise and principle of the Scriptures.
2. But, second, it is mustard seed.

How many of you, over forty, have used a mustard plaster, at one time or another? I don't know about these modern antibiotics, but I do know that mustard plasters work. I remember as a boy getting a congestion in my lungs and there was placed upon my chest a very gooey concoction of mustard, flour, and water, smeared around on a cloth. After it had been there a little while I began to feel it burn. In 10 or 15 minutes my chest was red as a beet, because mustard has a pungent quality about it. It is an irritant, it stirs things up. And it worked with me. I don't know why -- doctors can explain it, perhaps -- but it worked.

And that is what faith is like. Jesus chose that simile deliberately because faith has an irritating quality about it. Others hearing about it are stirred themselves to start to do things. Soon a chain reaction starts. When one person begins to live and operate by faith, it stirs up others, and others beyond them, and things keep going until who knows where it will end?

The strangely significant thing about this is that this new law, which was introduced into Israel by these five daughters of Zelophehad, centuries later made it possible for Jesus to inherit the throne of David through his mother, Mary. You know that our Lord was the commonly accepted son of Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth. That gave him a legal right to the throne though he was not the actual son of Joseph. If that right had been challenged he still had a right to the throne through his mother. Mary, who, as we know from tradition, was the only child of her parents. She was descended from another son of David, Nathan, and through him she also had a right to the throne of David, but only by virtue of this law in Israel that a daughter could inherit the inheritance of her father. So the long range effect of the faith of these five girls was to make doubly sure the right of Jesus to the throne of David.

How do you know what God is going to do with the faith you exercise today? That is the lure of the dynamic of faith. Others may be stirred to a new endeavor. In Philippians, Paul writes about his imprisonment in Rome, and he says "Many were made more bold to preach the gospel because of my imprisonment," {cf, Phil 1:14}. What did he mean? Why, when these Roman Christians saw that the Apostle Paul was in prison, but

his imprisonment was limited by the hand of God, and even Nero could only do certain things to this man but gave him a degree of liberty, they saw that the power of the Roman Empire was under the control of God. They were therefore emboldened to go out and preach the gospel throughout the city, so that Paul could say, "There is more gospel going on in Rome because I am in prison, than there would be if I were out." That has always stirred me to suggest that the best way to evangelize a city is to begin by locking the preachers up in jail!

Some of you remember reading that in Colonial America a young man, named David Brainerd, about twenty years of age, felt the call of God to go out to the American Indians. Through great hardships, alone in the wilderness, sick most of the time, that young man so gave himself in love for these Indians, through much prayer, heartache, and tribulation, that there broke out at last a great awakening among the Indians. They turned to Christ by the hundreds. He wrote a diary of his account, and over in Scotland a young man named Robert Murray McCheyne read the diary of David Brainerd, and his heart began to burn. In Scotland he began to preach the same gospel, and to pray as David Brainerd prayed. Somewhat later McCheyne's letters and sermons were gathered together and published and they blessed the heart of a young man in England named Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon went on to become the prince of Bible expositors of the English world, one of the greatest preachers of all time. Another young man who was touched by the lives of McCheyne and Brainerd was Hudson Taylor, the apostle to China. So the chain reaction of faith moves on.

A man named Edward Kimball went into a shoe store in Boston one day to visit one of his Sunday school boys, a young lad by the name of Dwight L. Moody. Through the halting testimony of his Sunday school teacher in the back of a shoe store, Dwight L. Moody came to Christ. God used him to touch the whole world of the 19th century for Christ. Who knows what an action of faith will do? Who can anticipate how God will pick it up and multiply it?

I have been thinking so much this year of how, twenty years ago, in 1948, five businessmen met in a home in Menlo Park and decided to rent a room in the Palo Alto Community Center to have a Bible fellowship time. Nobody had done anything like that before, but they felt God wanted them to do it, and they did; they obeyed. Out of the twenty or so people who gathered there that first Sunday evening has grown Peninsula Bible Church, in only twenty years time. God has honored the faith of five men who ventured for Christ.

Who knows what God will do or bring about, if you open your home and invite your neighbors in to get acquainted, and to find a door of witness with them later? Or if you take a Sunday school class, or an outreach class, or go on a Rural Outreach trip. Suppose you try a new approach to someone who has been blocking you in other ways. That is to operate by faith. It means to go out, not knowing whither you are going, like Abraham. When a person is obedient to God in that way, it begins a great chain reaction of faith, and no one can tell where it will possibly lead.

I am stirred by these five girls. Their names have come down to us because they were women of faith. There were many daughters in Israel that day, among those thousands of people, but these are the only five whose names we know, because they were women of faith, who believed in God, and claimed the inheritance that was theirs. I trust God will lead you the same way.

God calls you to the life of faith. Do not wait for the big and daring things for it is the little things that change the world.

I trust God will speak to your hearts about what he wants you do to in this hour.

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