

ACHSAH

Judges 15:16-19, Judges 1:12-15



IF YOU KNEW THE GIFT OF
GOD....



NAME : Achsah means anklet or ankle ornament, like a bangle.

ACHSAH

ABOUT : Daughter of Caleb, one of the spies who first went into the promised land, we hear nothing in scripture about her mother. She is the wife of Othneil, who becomes the first Judge of Israel, bringing peace for forty years. She was considered very beautiful, so much so that she is referred to in midrash as “When you see her you will be angry your wife” Othneil certainly sees her as worth facing the canaanites or the big Anakins in a battle for. Her dowry is a piece of land in the Negev, a dry and difficult land to live off without water. Achsah is wise enough to know she needs another gift from her father to thrive.

Scripture.

13 As the Lord commanded Joshua, part of the territory of Judah was given to Caleb son of Jephunneh, from the tribe of Judah. He received Hebron, the city belonging to Arba, father of Anak. 14 Caleb drove the descendants of Anak out of the city—the clans of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi. 15 From there he went to attack the people living in Debir. (This city used to be called Kiriath Sepher.) 16 Caleb said, “I will give my daughter Achsah in marriage to the man who succeeds in capturing Kiriath Sepher.” 17 Othniel, the son of Caleb's brother Kenaz, captured the city, so Caleb gave him his daughter Achsah in marriage. 14 When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. As she dismounted from her donkey, Caleb said to her, ‘What do you want?’ 15 She said to him, ‘Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the Negev, give me also Gulloth-mayim.’^[a] So Caleb gave her Upper Gulloth and Lower Gulloth.

WALKING THE LINE

We are encouraged to ask our generous Father for what we need. But Achsah has already been given so much. Is asking for more greedy or ungrateful — or is it faith?

I think there is a middle road here.

On one side is apathy: God has given me this field, so I'll just sit here and wait for him to do something with it. It can sound like surrender, but sometimes God is asking us to participate. Achsah could be given the springs, but she would still have to plant, tend and harvest the land. On the other side is presumption: If I do all the right things, God owes me the water. I pray, go to Mass, serve others and try to be good — therefore God should give me what I ask for. But grace isn't payment for good behaviour. God gives because he is generous, not because we have earned it. This makes our relationship transactional.

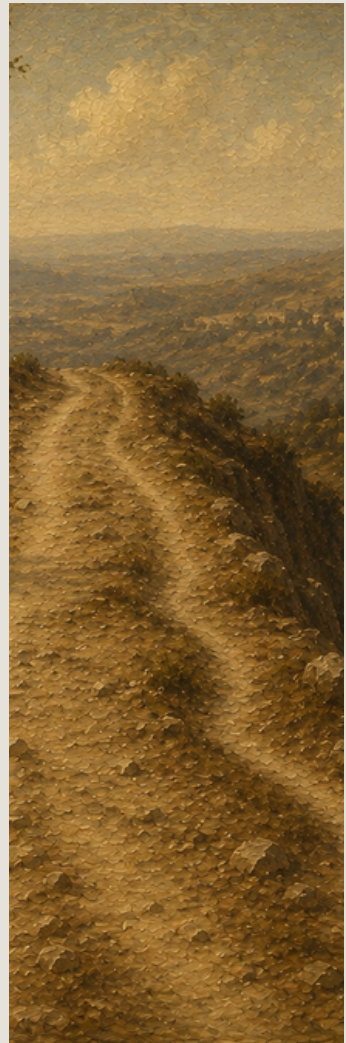
The middle road is trustful participation.

Achsah doesn't sit beside her barren field waiting for rain. Nor does she dig a hole and demand that her father put water in it. She goes to the father she trusts and asks for what she needs to make fruitful what he has already given her.

Perhaps that is the balance for us too: we ask, we trust, and we act.

Faith isn't sitting in a barren field waiting for rain. And it isn't demanding that there be water wherever we choose to dig.

Perhaps faith is simply bringing our dry field to the Father and saying, "You have given me this. Now show me what I need to make it fruitful."



Small group questions

1. Where do you stand on this road between apathy and presumption?
2. How do you ask God for what you need... do you ask God for it?
3. If you are honest with yourself is there any part of your relationship with God that feels or slides into transactional ?
4. Is there any part that feels too apathetic ?



WELLSPRING OF PRAYER

Teresa of Avila describes four ways of watering, corresponding to the soul's growth in prayer.

First — drawing water from a well.

This involves the greatest effort. Teresa compares it to the beginnings of prayer, when we have to work hard to recollect ourselves, resist distractions, meditate, and deliberately turn our attention toward God. It's not inferior prayer; it's simply laborious prayer. You can see the connection with the biblical landscape we've been discussing. You have water—but you must lower the bucket, fill it, pull it up and carry it to the garden.

Second — using a water wheel.

Less human effort is required and more water is produced. Teresa associates this with the Prayer of

Quiet, when God begins to act more noticeably within the soul. We're still cooperating, but increasingly God is doing what we cannot make for ourselves

Third — irrigation from a stream or river.

Now the gardener doesn't have to keep hauling individual buckets. Water flows through channels and saturates the garden.

Prayer becomes increasingly received rather than produced. God's action predominates.

Fourth — rain.

This is the most beautiful image. The gardener doesn't water at all. God sends the rain. The whole garden is watered without the gardener being able to claim responsibility for it. Teresa uses this for a profound state of contemplative prayer in which God takes the initiative and the soul receives.

So there is a progression: Well → water wheel → flowing water → rain

Small Group Discussion

1. Where do I see my prayer life in this framework?
2. Have I ever considered that it could be something that deepens?
3. Have I had deeper moments of prayer, or sense of His presence?
4. Deeper prayer is a gift from God, Have I asked Him for it?

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

“The water that I will give Him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life”

John 4:13-14



Reflection

This is the Holy Spirit, rising and filling our being, God's living water. Achsah's story tells us that we may have all the raw materials but without God's grace nothing bears fruit. If you mapped out all the areas of your life, where is God's living water reaching and what areas need to be fed from the spring more? Every part of 'the field' is capable of providing a harvest. But for that to happen every part needs to be watered by His grace.

For Personal reflection

Your life is the field you have been gifted by the Lord

How is it watered?

Consider all the different areas of your life,

Your work

Your family

Your friendships

Your prayer life

Your service to others

Your rest and relaxation

1. Where am I digging holes to water it myself ?

2. Where have I just accepted this is it - dry with occasional drizzle?

3. Where have I or do I need to ask God to pour out abundantly ?

THE JESUS CONNECTION

The encounter of Jesus with the woman at the well is the fulfilment of Achsah's story. Achsah asks for water; Jesus offers it.

The Parallels

A woman - A need - A request - A gifting - Water - New life.

Caleb gives Achsah the external springs to water her inheritance. Jesus offers the spring internally for an eternal inheritance.



Achsah's story starts with a battle and a victory. She becomes the bride; she is given a vocation and an inheritance. The Springs are the means by which she can do this.

For the Church, the story follows the same; Christ's victory on the cross wins the battle; the Church becomes the Bride; we too are given an inheritance and vocation, only made possible by the grace of the Holy Spirit,

WORKS OF MERCY - Give Drink to the Thirsty

"For I will pour out water to quench your thirst and to irrigate your parched fields. And I will pour out my spirit on your descendants, and my blessing on your children. They will thrive like watered grass" Isaiah 44:3-4

This week the challenge is to donate some money to wateraid or a similar charity that fund Clean water for countries in the third world. 771 million people don't have access to clean water at home. Not to drink, not to wash, not to flush a toilet. If you're wondering how much to donate perhaps get a group together and commit to drink tap water and the money saved from bottled water or bought drinks can be donated. It currently costs around £472 to provide clean water for a village of 120 people.

TAKING IT TO PRAYER

Father, You have given each of us a field to tend,

Give us the living water of Your grace.

When we forget that the field itself is already a gift,

Make us grateful daughters, Father.

When the ground feels dry and we are tempted to abandon it,

Give us the living water of Your grace.

When we try to make our lives fruitful by our own strength,

Teach us to come to You and ask.

For the upper springs that draw our hearts towards You,

Father, pour out Your grace.

For the lower springs that water our ordinary lives,

Father, pour out Your grace.

For the places within us that have become dry and hard,

Let Your living water flow.

For the gifts You have planted in us that have yet to bear fruit,

Let Your living water flow.

And when we thirst for something we cannot name,

Lead us to Jesus, the source of living water.

Closing Prayer

Father, like Achsah, we come before You as daughters.

You have already given us so much this life, this field to cultivate. Forgive us when we look at its dryness and fail to recognise the gift. But Father, we also know that we cannot make it fruitful alone. So today we ask with Achsah: "Give us a blessing; give us springs of water." Where we are dry, bring life. Where we are weary, refresh us. Where we have tried to produce fruit by our own effort, teach us to receive. Give us the living water Jesus promised—

Your Holy Spirit dwelling within us, watering what You have planted and bringing to fruit what You have entrusted to us.

May we never despise the field because it is dry, nor mistake the field for something we earned. It is all gift. We simply come to You as daughters and ask: Father, give us the springs.

Amen.



SPIRITUAL DRYNESS

“Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev.
Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.”
Psalm 126

Ever had a season when prayer felt like wading through water, when the connection you once felt in prayer seems to be missing?

Why it happens

As hard as it feels it is usually a good sign that God is weaning you off “the feels”. Its a training ground to love God for himself not for anything you receive from Him. It is learning to love the giver not the gift. We can confuse the good feelings (consolations) for God himself. The dryness, the feeling of absence grows our thirst, increases our desire for His presence, it gently humbles us. We can think we have done something wrong, that God is absent, He isnt He is very close.

Waiting it out

The invitation is to wait by the well, to remain faithful, St Ignatius tells us not to change a thing in times of desolation. Still turn up even when you have nothing to say, Use those rote prayers, offer the nothing you feel you have to bring. God is revealing to us our own thirst.

Like Achsah we can ask

But what comes isn't always what we think we need, the upper spring has to be given first priority, even when we feel like the lower field is dying and of more importance, God knows what we need. The woman at the well leaves her jar behind, the external thirst is quenched by the encounter with the rising up of that internal living water.

