

Sunday – February 20, 2011 AM

Strength and Courage – Joshua 1:1-9

Joshua is the sixth book of the Bible and immediately follows the Pentateuch or Torah – the Law of Moses. Many feel it should be part of the Torah. It begins right after the death of Moses, and because of that, is not included in the books of Moses – makes sense – right?

Joshua is a story of victory in the Lord. It is the first of the historical books of the O.T. This book describes the story of Israel's entry into the Land of Promise. If you remember way back in Genesis chapter 12, after God blessed Abram and told him to move to a new location, the Bible says in verse 7, ***“Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘I will give this land to your descendants.’”*** It tells us that the land was not vacant; it was occupied by the Canaanites even in Abram's time. However, God promised this Land to Israel way back then. The people hung onto this very important promise of their own land, and they hoped to see this promise fulfilled. The book of Joshua describes the fulfillment of God's promise of the Land for His people.

God reminded them of this promise again when He brought them out of Egypt – out of slavery and on their way to the Land of Promise. However, because of their disobedience, they wandered around in circles in the wilderness for 40 years without seeing the promise come to pass. It was God's will and desire for them to have this land – so what happened to God keeping his word? How long have you been praying for a promise of God to be fulfilled in your life? Did He forget or something? Did you heard wrong? I don't think so.

The Christian life is not only a matter of being called OUT of a wilderness of a land of slavery to sin, but it is also a matter of entering into an inheritance, a Land of Promise. However, many of us grow content with being delivered from the bondage of our past Egypts, and we never get around to entering into the Promised Land of what God wants for us, even in this life.

We have faith enough to leave Egypt, but somewhere during our journey we falter – just like the Israelites in the wilderness. It's so easy to see, while reading these stories, how stupid these people were. Don't we do the very same things today – all the time? We are so similar to them it's frightening. We fail to lay hold of the faith that takes us over the Jordan and into the Promised Land. In Joshua we see Israel entering the Land of Promise and the errors, fears, and triumphs that go along with that. God reveals to us through this book the pattern for victory! The first enemy situation Israel had to face was the fortified city of Jericho. It was an insurmountable obstacle. It had tremendous walls and was a super fortress of a city. It may have been the first city this group of desert nomads ever encountered, and there would be more. The Israelites saw their own feebleness and the uselessness of their weapons against such a powerful foe.

Maybe this is why Joshua begins his book the way he does ...

READ: Joshua 1:1-9

Life Application Study Bible – A. Entering the Promised Land (1:1-5:12)

After wandering for 40 years in the wilderness, a new generation is ready to enter Canaan. But first God prepares both Joshua and the nation by teaching them the importance of courageous and consistent faith. The nation then miraculously crosses the Jordan River to begin the long-awaited conquest of the Promised Land. Like Joshua, we, too, need faith to begin and continue living the Christian life.

They would certainly need strength and courage to be successful in the mission God set before them even if He promised them victory in the end! The first battle they face was to defeat the city of Jericho. It was an impossible mission, and it would be enough to take the wind out of the sails of the most faithful servant of the Lord. They must have thought, “How can we ever prevail over a walled city like this?” Have you ever felt like that? Has there ever been, or is there now, an obstacle in your life that seems insurmountable – unconquerable – defeating? Maybe it’s a person or a sickness or a situation that seems to stand in your path blocking you from victory and the peace God wants for you. It is preventing you from entering your Land of Promise that God intends for you. It could be one HUGE thing or a bunch of small things that collectively have become a road-block to your God intended goal or dwelling place. Whatever it is – that is your Jericho! Are you trying with all your might to defeat this thing, but it just won’t go away and die? Are you fighting and planning in your own strength and knowledge? The story of the defeat of Jericho is symbolic of the world and its assault on the Christian and of Jesus Christ’s enabling victory over the world.

The Jericho story of victory is immediately followed by the story of Ai, an insignificant little town (nothing like Jericho). This should have been an easy victory of Joshua and his army. BUT – Ai defeated Israel and sent them running. Why? Because there was sin in the Israelite camp – the sin of ONE man affected Israel’s ability to be victorious in battle until dealt with. The sin of even one person can affect the entire church or body of Christ. We’re all in this together. The story of Ai is symbolic of fleshly sin – its subtlety, and its seeming insignificance, but it’s still a big deal to God!

We fool ourselves into thinking we can control our tempers and our lusts by simply deciding to do so – How’s that working for you lately? I am not good at this at all. We find it is not that easy – and the results can be disastrous and defeating.

The book of Joshua contains all aspects of living with God, both victories and defeats. But, let’s look at **Joshua 13:1 – “When Joshua was an old man, the Lord said to him, ‘You are growing old, and much land remains to be conquered...’”** We all face this same peril – we are tempted to stop short of complete victory, and we don’t realize or want to think that we are in the battle of temptations our entire lives. Victory over one battle feels great and rewarding, but sooner or later the next one will come along and smack us down spiritually. We can’t rest easy over any one small victory in our lives.

The Spirit of God within us gives us power to experience victory! But somehow, many of us back off, settle down, get comfortable, and sometimes stop short. We say in our core, “I think I’ve made a lot of progress in this run, and I’m in much better shape now than I was before. I know I haven’t yet conquered all aspects of sin in my life, but I have conquered so much.” Have you ever experienced this? I have! Do you feel this way now? The enemy has you right where he wants you!

Jesus said, ***“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”*** (Matt. 5:6). This kind of hunger and thirst is something we should never out-grow, out-live, or get past in our lives. We are in a battle for our entire life – until God calls us home – We will never arrive this side of glory, in all likelihood. We must battle through to the conclusion, or we lose.

At the end of this book, Joshua urges the people of Israel not to slack off – there is so much more to accomplish for God! The temptation to compromise will be an ever-present foe. However Joshua puts this before them... ***“So fear the LORD and serve Him whole heartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshipped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord alone. But if you refuse to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.”*** (Joshua 24:14-15).

There was never a compromise in Joshua’s life, never a willingness to stop the fight. He was on the march until the day he died! He was one of the spies who reported that the land was good and God would give it to them. The beginning of this book is so fitting and appropriate... “Be strong and courageous!” It was told to Joshua three times in our text. Let’s look at the commands in our text, the challenges in our text, and the promises in our text.

Commands:

- The time has come for you to Lead! (Joshua was to fulfill God’s Land promise)
- God sets the boundaries – Negev to the Lebanon Mountains to the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River. We have to stay within the boundaries God has established for our lives.
- **Be strong and courageous** – three times God commanded this and said this is a command.
- Obey My instructions – found in the Word – Do NOT deviate at all.
- Do not be afraid or discouraged.

Challenges:

- Moses – the leader extraordinaire is dead – God was with him with signs and wonders, power and victory, and he was known as the “servant of the Lord.” This was a tall order to fill for Joshua. You’re the new Moses! WHAT? Did you notice how, in our reading, Moses had all kinds of excuses when God called him? Aaron became his mouthpiece and spokesman. But, as the story progresses, we see less and less of Aaron. Only Moses remains at the end to receive the accolades from God for a job well done. Now, it’s Joshua’s turn. A great challenge is posed to him. How would you react? At the end of Joshua’s life, he was called the “servant of the Lord.”
- “You are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them.” (Has God called you to something you can’t imagine being able to do?)
- Be careful to obey all of my instructions.
- Don’t deviate from them – to the right or to the left (at all – not even a little bit).
- Only then will you prosper and succeed.

Promises:

- God chose Joshua to lead His people into the Promised Land – He was to lead the people – to fulfill God’s promise to them from generations and centuries before. What God promised to Abram and down to Moses, Joshua was going to fulfill. God made a promise to Joshua that he was going to fulfill God’s promise to Israel – How Cool is that? “I promise you what I promised Moses.” The Land is theirs!
- “No one would be able to stand against them...” enemies would fall before Israel as they pursued the land promised by God.
- I will be with you... I will not leave you or forsake you. (He will be with us through anything).
- You will be successful – IF – you obey my instructions diligently.
- IF – you study, meditate constantly, and obey – THEN – you will prosper.
- God is with you wherever you go! (Whether I sense Him or not – ask Him or not).

<Pastor Jerry from GM – 2/18/11>

We are commanded to study the Bible...continually. We need to hear God’s Word from the Bible by attending Sunday mornings to hear the message. We need to study God’s Word by attending the Bible Studies that the church offers.

But that is not enough we must also read and study the Bible on our own during the week. Again, I remind you that we are commanded to, “Study this Book of Instruction continually.” Yet, even this is not enough, we must do more than read and study, we must meditate on it day and night. We must think, reflect, get quiet before God and in His presence hear what He has to say about what we are reading and studying. We must get God’s Word into our hearts and not just our heads.

Yet, this too is not enough for we must be sure to obey everything written in it. We must know it and make it so much a part of us that when situations arise we will know what God instructs us to do in those situations and we need to obey those instructions. After all, it is a book of instructions; a manual for living. As with many other things, follow the instructions and you will succeed in what God has called you to – living for and with Him.

SO – Be strong and courageous – Be very strong and courageous – I command you, be strong and courageous. The words echo in our ears and our hearts. To some these have been words of encouragement; to others they are a serious challenge. Whatever your take on it, we must be strong and courageous – in the Lord – all the time. This passage may be very familiar to you; you may have heard it read, preached, and you may have read it a thousand times yourself. You know what it says and what it means. You know all the things mentioned today regarding how to be strengthened. BUT – are you doing your exercises? Are you working out – spiritually? Do you go to the gym (church) regularly?

I, personally, have never been one for exercise and routine work-outs. I was always skinny and somewhat healthy, but I never intentionally worked out. I always participated in many sports (although never really good at any of them). My constant activity was all the exercise I needed without the discipline. Now that I am older and not constantly playing sports all year long, I am faced with a dilemma. As most of you know, I seriously blew out a disc in my lower back the summer before last. The doctors are trying to deal with this situation without surgery, but it requires – guess what? – yep – you got it – EXERCISE treatment. After many weeks of PT, my functioning came back quite a bit. All I have to do now is maintain an exercise plan to build up my core and stay limber with stretching.

The first thing I slacked off on was the exercise and then the stretching. Now I am in pain often, have a numb foot and get leg cramps almost all the time, especially during the night when trying to sleep. I do not have good discipline in this area of my life, even though I know it is what I need to be strong. You can watch thousands of people exercising, but if you don't do it yourself, you will not benefit from it. When the time comes, you will not be strong enough to hang in the battle and succeed.

I know a family whose lives were changed overnight. Sean Vaz was a star Bellport football player and then worked in an office. At age 25, a little over two years ago, while on a motorcycle fun trip with a friend, he crashed badly. He almost died, but somehow survived the brain trauma and blood loss. The results of that moment in time left Sean with a seriously mangled right arm and a missing right leg that was amputated at the knee. Today is day 772 in his road to recovery. He is still fighting every single day to regain mobility and some sense of a normal life. His dad, Jim, works at Brookhaven Lab. He makes an online entry every single day on Sean's progress – in detail. Sean knows what it means to be strong and courageous. The victory may be promised by God Himself, but Sean has to walk that out every minute of every day.

Jim and I have grown close because of his son's accident. We sit on a Lab-wide communication planning committee, but never knew each other aside from those quarterly meetings. Suddenly, we were thrust upon each other. Because I lead a small Bible study and prayer group at the Lab, and because I have an email distribution for anyone who wants to pray for needs as they come up or join in the Bible study lessons, Jim heard and responded. We have been praying in support for Sean for over two years now and we continue to do so. Jim's tag line on every daily update is this – "Keep those prayers coming cause that's what keeps him going."

So – be strong and courageous. You don't know what is waiting around the next corner of your life. Last weekend I was on the phone with a friend who went to the clinic because of some abdominal pain on the lower right side – it could be the appendix. After a C-AT scan, the doctor sat her down to explain why he believed she had cancer, and he needed to do a colonoscopy to determine the extent of the disease and how to proceed. Surgery would likely be planned for the next day (Sunday). This turned out NOT to be the case, thanks to God and all who prayed. However, her life was totally interrupted by the possibilities. Be very strong and courageous. She was able to face this situation because of her faith, which she nurtures daily. She exercises spiritually, every day. She reads, studies, and prays constantly. If you were to ask her, she might say she needs more exercise, but at least she saw firsthand the importance of keeping her spiritual life in good health.

So be strong and courageous – be very strong and courageous – God commands you to be strong and courageous. You can't rely on what you don't have when the time comes. We need to be exercising now – before things happen, so we will be successful when they do. Can you defeat a fortified city of Jericho in your life in your own strength? NO. Can you be easily defeated by an insignificant little wimpy town like Ai in your life – especially when you've seen how well you succeeded in other larger battles? YES. We must be strong and courageous in order to enter our Land of Promise. The way we do that is to repent for not being as diligent as we should and commit to God that you will discipline yourself into good spiritual exercise habits (mentioned earlier). Don't stop short of your Promised Land.