

Strong and Courageous - Joshua 1:1-9

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I. INTRODUCTION

Has God ever given you a challenging and overwhelming task to complete that just seemed like more than you could possibly handle? Has he ever called you to do something that strikes fear in your heart and tempts you to run in the complete opposite direction? How have you responded to God in these situations? I'm sure we've all responded throughout our lives in a wide variety of ways to difficult things God has asked us to do. I can think of a few times when I've boldly answered God's call and obeyed; other times when I've timidly and fearfully tried to obey; other times when I've made excuses and rationalized my way out of obedience; and a few times when I've stubbornly disobeyed and headed off in the complete opposite direction like Jonah. God gives us freedom, doesn't he, to choose how to respond to his calling? But nonetheless, how we respond has very real consequences, good or bad, in our lives and in our walk with God.

The classic example of this truth is the experience of the Israelites as they stood on the edge of the promised land after their brief and miracle-filled journey out of Egypt through the wilderness to the mountain of the Lord, and then on to Kadesh-Barnea. After giving the Israelites the chance to preview and scope out the land, God was now calling the Israelites to face the giants and the fortified cities in the promised land and trust that the God who had powerfully led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and who had continually shown his presence in a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day, would give them the victory as they trusted in him and stepped out in faith. But the choice was theirs and in order to experience the victory God would provide they would have to show their faith by taking action and following his instructions. God wasn't just going to have the Israelites hang out in Kadesh-Barnea while he went by himself and destroyed the enemies in the promised land. They would have to walk out in dependence on God and trust that he would go with them and give them everything they needed for victory. They would need to get their fighting gear on and start heading toward the battle.

This was the choice facing the Israelites as they considered how to respond to God's call on their lives. Would they trust God and boldly and confidently enter the promised land by his power, or would they let fear and doubt rule their lives and keep them from God's blessings? Unfortunately, they made the wrong choice, didn't they? And the consequences for giving in to fear and refusing to trust God were severe. They completely missed out on what God wanted to give them. A 1-year journey to the promised land turned into 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and a constant experience of regret at having seen what God wanted to give them but then turning it down because of fear and unbelief. And all but two of the adults died before they could enter the promised land. The two that were finally able to enter were the two who were willing to trust and obey God.

Well, today, we're going to start a new journey in our study of the Bible on Sunday mornings. We're going to step back in history to the end of those 40 years of wandering and discipline and see what we can learn through a study of the book of Joshua about how not to make the same mistake in our walks with God that the Israelites made in theirs. We're going to see what it looks like when people choose to respond to God's call with strength and courage instead of fear and doubt. And on the way, we're going to learn a lot about who God is, how we can learn to walk in his ways by his power, and much more.

Today we'll be beginning our study in Joshua chapter 1, verses 1 through 9. But before we read the passage I'd like to give a little context about where the book picks up in history. As we already noted, we're at the end of the Israelites' 40 years of waiting and wandering on the edge of the promised land. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses had just completed reviewing the terms of the Mosaic Covenant with the Israelites, the Law given by God at Mount Horeb 40 years earlier. He had also given a final blessing to Israel and to each of the 12 tribes. Then in Deuteronomy chapter 34, we learn that God took Moses up to the peak of Mount Nebo, which was overlooking Jericho and the north end of the Dead Sea, and there he showed Moses the full extent of the promised land from a bird's eye view. Though Moses wouldn't be able to enter the land himself, God allowed him to see it from a distance.

We're told that Moses then died at the age of 120, but that even at that old age "his eye was not dim nor his vigor abated." The power of God working in Moses through his "face to face" relationship with God even affected his physical body and caused him to be healthy and energetic even at age 120! Then, after Moses' death, Israel wept and mourned for him for 30 days in plains of Moab, east of the Dead Sea. And this is the moment in history where the book of Joshua picks up.

But before we read our passage for today, I want to read Deuteronomy 34, verse 9, which introduces Joshua as the new leader of the Israelites following the death of Moses:

9 Now Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.

In this verse we learn that Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him and commissioned him as the next leader of Israel. However, back in the book of Numbers, chapter 27, verse 18, we also learn that the Lord is the One who instructed Moses to lay his hands on Joshua and that even before the laying on of hands Joshua was filled with the Holy Spirit. The laying on of hands was a special commissioning by God and seems to have imparted to Joshua an extra dose of wisdom which, as we'll see, was much needed because of the job Joshua was about to take on.

Our friend, Joshua, as most of you know, was one of the 2 spies who had, 40 years earlier, called the Israelites to boldly enter the promised land with confidence in the power of God. And what we see here is that during the 40 years of wandering that followed, God had preserved his life, empowered him with the Spirit, and prepared him to take over from Moses. I find some comfort and encouragement in considering how God sustained and empowered Joshua and deepened his relationship with him even though through no fault of his own he had to undergo the 40 years of God's discipline along with the rest of the Israelites. It reminds us that ultimately we can only control our own decisions and our own response to God and that God will continue to grow us and sustain us and empower us as we respond to him appropriately even when we're enduring difficult times brought on by poor decisions of other people or events over which we have no control.

God is faithful and we can continue to healthy and fruitful in any circumstance as we seek him and walk with him.

II. TEXT AND OVERVIEW

So enough on the background. Let's begin the book of Joshua by reading verses 1 through 9:

1 Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, 2 "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. 3 "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. 4 "From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory. 5 "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. 6 "Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 "Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. 8 "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. 9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word.

III. THE LORD SPEAKS A CHALLENGING COMMISSION (v. 2)

After reporting the death of Moses and setting the time frame, the book of Joshua opens with the Lord himself speaking directly to Joshua. As he had spoken directly with Moses, the Lord was now speaking directly to Joshua and verses 2 through 9 record actual words that God spoke to Joshua. Imagine how compelling these instructions would have been for Joshua, knowing that they were being spoken from the very mouth of God himself!

Well, after stating the fact that Moses is dead, God gets right down to business, and he calls Joshua to a very challenging task that's going to require bold action and great courage on his part. God says, "**...arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel.**" It's time to face the giants. It's time to fight some intense battles. It's time to boldly lead. It's time to get up and lead this huge group of difficult people across that river you've been forbidden to cross for 40 years. Do you think this could have seemed like an intimidating challenge and a difficult calling to Joshua? After all, he had seen first-hand for many, many years, the challenges and attacks and complaining and second-guessing Moses had experienced in trying to lead the Israelites. Now it was Joshua's turn to give it a shot! Is the challenge you're facing in your life as big as this one?

IV. THE LORD PROVIDES WHAT'S NEEDED TO POWERFULLY AND COURAGEOUSLY FULFILL THE COMMISSION (vs. 3-9)

Well, fortunately, the Lord as always is gracious to Joshua, just as he is always gracious to us, and in verses 3 through 9 we see him providing Joshua with everything he needed to powerfully and courageously fulfill the calling the Lord now had on his life...to be strong and courageous in leading the Israelites to finally take possession of the promised land.

I'm sure you already noticed as we read the passage that the Lord used the phrase, "be strong and courageous," 3 times in his speech, even adding the word, "very," to courageous 1 of the times. Clearly the Lord knew that Joshua would need to be strong and very courageous if he was going to walk out this challenging call the Lord had on his life. And the Lord also knew that Joshua would only find the strength and courage he needed by trusting in him.

I don't know if you remember from your knowledge of the Old Testament, but Joshua's birth name was actually, Hoshea, which means, "salvation." That seems like a pretty powerful and significant name, doesn't it? Of course that name could easily go to someone's head, couldn't it? I mean, if my name was salvation, I could easily start thinking I must be somebody pretty special. Yup! Need saving? Guess what, that's not just my middle name...that's my first name! I specialize in salvation! 😊 Well, fortunately Moses did Hoshea a big favor and cleared up any possibility of him thinking that he in himself would bring salvation. He renamed Hoshea, Joshua, or Yeshua in Hebrew pronunciation, which means "Yahweh is salvation," the same name later given to the one and only true Savior, Jesus.

You see, in the very name the Lord had previously given to Joshua through Moses, and now in the very words he was speaking directly to him, the Lord was making very clear to Joshua that his only hope for success, salvation and for being strong and courageous in the challenging calling set before him was to keep his eyes on Yahweh and find what he needed only in him. But the Lord gets even more specific in providing Joshua what he needs to be strong and courageous. He gives him, in these verses, 3 powerful tools that will guide him into the strength and courage he needs:

1. The confidence that the commission is God's will and has his full and active support (vs. 3-4, 6)

The first tool the Lord gives Joshua, in verses 3 and 4 and in verse 6, is the assurance that taking the promised land at this time in history is the Lord's will and Joshua can have confidence that he will have the Lord's full and active power on his side. The Lord says, "***Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you...***" So certain is the victory Joshua will have as he walks out in the Lord's strength, that the Lord can describe the land as already given to the Israelites. The language the Lord repeatedly uses in this speech to Joshua indicates the certainty of victory: it "will be your territory;" and "you shall give this people possession of the land."

Joshua would find the strength and courage he needed by understanding that what he was being called to do was completely in step with God's will and that God's full and active power would be at work to bring it about. As Joshua functioned as the Lord's servant (like Moses), working for the Lord's purposes in

dependence and submission, the Lord would be giving him everything he needed to accomplish those purposes.

And the same is true for each of us today. To be strong and courageous in God's call on your life, you need the confidence that as you seek to accomplish his purposes in reliance on him, he will be providing his full and active support...he will be fighting your battles and giving you the victory. Do you have that confidence today?

2. The promise of God's constant presence, power and faithfulness (vs. 5, 9)

The second tool the Lord provides to Joshua for finding the strength and courage he needs is found in verses 5 and 9. Joshua learns there that he can be strong and courageous as he knows and believes that the Lord's constant presence, power and faithfulness are with him wherever he goes. The Lord says to Joshua, "**No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.**" And he even ends his speech to Joshua by repeating this truth again: "**Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.**" The way Joshua could be strong and courageous is by knowing and believing that the Lord was absolutely faithful and trustworthy and would be with him and working on his behalf at all times wherever he would go. This is where his strength and courage would come from!

Can we as believers in Christ today have this same confidence that God himself is with us constantly and will never fail us or forsake us? Absolutely. In fact, those of us who have believed in Christ and invited him to be our Savior and Lord, actually have God's Holy Spirit permanently dwelling inside of us forever. We live in the present reality of what Jesus promised before he went to the cross: "**I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.**" God himself is abiding with and living in each true believer in Christ and we can have every bit as much confidence as Joshua that wherever we go he will be with us and giving us the power, strength and courage we need as we seek to walk with him and accomplish his purposes.

3. The perfect manual and guidebook (vs. 7-8)

And finally, the third tool the Lord gave Joshua for walking out his calling with strength and courage was the book of the law, the perfect manual and guidebook to keep him in communion with God and in step with his purposes at all times.

In verses 7 and 8, the Lord says to Joshua:

7 "Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. 8 "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

Notice that Joshua's very success was dependent on him both knowing and putting into practice God's principles found in the book of the law. He wouldn't be successful unless he both knew it and put it into practice. He was to meditate on it day and night, recite it, speak it, teach it, live it, and allow it to be so much a part of him that all of his words, choices and actions flowed out of the truths he found there. The Lord tells him 2 times to be careful to do according to **ALL** that's written in it. Head knowledge wasn't enough. Partial obedience wouldn't cut it. Full immersion in and full submission to God's Word was the path to success and prosperity in walking worthy of call God had on Joshua's life. Knowing it and living it out would provide him with the strength and courage he needed for the difficult path ahead and make sure he stayed in step with God's purposes.

And notice in verse 8 that Joshua wouldn't be able to carefully do God's Word without knowing it and meditating on it day and night: "***This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it...***" And the same is true for us today. We won't be able to live God's Word and know what his purposes are unless we are immersed in it and treating it as the life-giving treasure that it is.

A few other Scriptures will drive this home:

Psalm 1:1-3

1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.

Psalm 19:7-11

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. 10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

Colossians 3:16

16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Matthew 7:24-27

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell — and great was its fall."

Nothing can build your strength and courage in fulfilling God's calling on your life like knowing and living God's Word, and this was the third tool the Lord gave Joshua as he prepared to accept the daunting challenge of leading a difficult and unruly group of people to boldly and courageously take the promised land.

V. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

So to wrap up and apply what we've learned today in these first few verses of Joshua, the 3 things Joshua needed and that you and I also need today in order to be strong and courageous and successful in facing the difficult callings God has given are:

- 1) Confidence that what you're seeking to accomplish is in step with God's purposes and something he will actively and fully support.

If the difficult challenge you're trying to face is self-focused and out of step with God's purposes, you shouldn't expect him to be working on your behalf and giving you what you need, should you? If, however, you're trying to love your neighbor, share the gospel, preach the Word, make disciples, resolve a difficult conflict, keep your marriage together, or accomplish any other task that you know is in step with God's will, you can be confident that God will be actively and fully supporting you and providing you with what you need as you look to him...as you call out to him continually in prayer.

- 2) To be strong and courageous you need a heart belief that God truly is with you and in you at all times and is faithful to fill you up and provide you with what you need in every challenge. You need to believe that he will never leave you or forsake you.

This heart belief will be shown to be real when you're willing to step out in faith...start walking...and follow what you know the Lord is asking you to do even when it seems over your head or too big for you to handle. Ask God to grow within you this kind of faith and trust in his presence and power in you and with you at all times...that you would believe what Jesus promised to his followers when he gave the Great Commission...a very intimidating

and daunting calling given to each of us that's much like Joshua's. Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 28:18-20?

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

All authority has been given to Jesus and he is with each true believer always, even to the end of the age. Living in and drawing on this reality of Christ's presence and power with us is how we are able to strongly and courageously carry out the Great Commission and other challenging callings God has given us.

- 3) To be strong and courageous, you need constant immersion in and complete submission to the powerful Word of God.

Are you treasuring God's Word, reading it regularly, meditating on it, memorizing it, reciting it throughout the day, and putting it into practice? Or is it just something you know you should do, but rarely ever get around to actually doing? What changes do you need to make in your life today so that God's Word can be your guidebook and manual for every moment of your life? Want some ideas? How about asking your spouse to keep you accountable and planning to meet for a half hour each week to share what God's been teaching you in Scripture or what verses encouraged or otherwise impacted you? How about doing a Bible study together or following a Bible reading plan together? How about finding a friend to be accountable with and sharing what you're reading and what God's teaching you in Scripture?

Surveys of Bible-believing Christians show that a very small percentage of them actually read their Bibles on a regular basis. A friend recently told me that not too long ago he asked a group of church elders how many of them read their Bible every day and something like 1 out of 10 raised their hand. Let's not let that be true of us. Let's read it, meditate on it, memorize it, talk about it, and apply it to all of our daily lives and choices!

So as we close today, how would you describe your walk with God right now? Is it timid and fearful or is it strong and courageous? Are you living in fear and shying away from things you know God is calling you to do? Do you believe that God really is with you right now and at all times and will faithfully empower you as you step out in faith to accomplish his purposes?

Like Joshua, we each have a challenging commission from God and we can powerfully and courageously fulfill it as we breathe in and live out God's Word and walk out his will in our lives with confident trust in His presence and power working in and through us! ***For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline*** (2 Timothy 1:6-7)! ***Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*** (Hebrews 4:16). ***For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power*** (1 Corinthians 4:20). Amen?!