

Joshua 1: 1-9

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[0 : 00] It's good to be here with you today. I'm not sure, Tom, did we run out of service booklets? Do we still have some? Okay, good. Excellent. I wasn't sure how many we put out. I'm going to ask you to turn in your Bibles today to the book of Joshua, chapter 1, verses 1 through 9. And it's right after Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and it's on page 189 in your pew Bibles, page 189.

And I invite you to turn there and sort of my New Year's gift to you. Some of you, I'm sure this is a very, very, very familiar passage.

But for me, this is a text that I look at virtually every New Year's Day. And in fact, it's a text that I look at virtually every time I have to enter into sort of a new phase in my life, or any time that I have to take on a new project or a new endeavor, or any time when I realize that I'm going to need some strength and I'm going to need some courage.

[1 : 19] And I know there's probably many of you have looked at this text yourselves. It is a classic text which talks about our need for strength and courage and what is needed for godly success.

And I wasn't sure this morning if I'd have six people in church or six, I knew I wouldn't have 600, but or 200 people in church. But I thought it's not often that I preach on New Year's Day.

And I thought I'd share with you some meditations and reflections upon this classic text. And if all that you get out of the service, out of the sermon this morning is an awareness of such a brilliant text that can guide you whenever you have to take on a new venture or go into a new year or any time you're turning a corner in your life.

If all that happens this morning is you become aware of the existence of this text so that you yourselves will meditate upon it and turn to it in times of transition and in times of crisis, then my job has been done.

But this is, through generations and generations, this has been a text of scripture that people have turned to. So I'm just going to read it again and we'll stop and I'll point out some of the, just some of the major teachings and principles of godly success and how to move forward in a godly manner which are contained in this verse.

[2 : 48] Just before I start reading on page 189, the context is, for some of you, you know that Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt and then Moses sent 12 men to look at the promised land.

And you might remember that out of the 12 people who went to look at the promised land, 10 of them came back and said, we can't go into the promised land. The promised land is filled with scary, tough, strong people and we are too weak to deal with this.

And there were only two people who said, no, no, no, no, no, our god is big enough to deal with these problems. Let's just trust god. Don't look at how big they are and how strong they are and how powerful they are and how wonderful their cities are and how spectacular their religion seems to be.

Don't look at any of these things. Trust in god and let's move forward. And out of these 12 spies, 10 of whom counseled fear, two counseled courage.

One of those who counseled courage was Joshua. And as you know, unfortunately, the people of Israel believed the 10 and disbelieved Joshua and the other.

[4 : 09] And so they turned back from the promised land and they were to spend 40 years wandering in the wilderness. And as you know, there was a, God said to the people of Israel, all of you adult men who were too, who did not trust me enough to go forward.

None of you will enter the promised land. And it is your children whom you thought would die who will be the ones who will enter into the promised land. And 40 years later, Joshua throughout this

entire 40 years had been Moses' assistant and close confidant.

And after 40 years of wandering throughout the promised land, they come once again to the banks of the Jordan River and they are once again in a position to enter into the promised land and Moses dies.

Moses dies in fulfillment of something that God had told them because Moses himself in those 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, Moses himself had lost his trust and faith in God and refused to honor God in the company of the people.

And God said to Moses, you also will not enter the promised land. You will take the people to the edge of the promised land, but you yourself will not enter. And so Moses has died.

[5 : 28] And there had never been anybody like Moses who spoke to God, as the scripture says, face to face. And after he had spoken to God, he had to put a veil over his face because the glory of God's presence just so erupted out of Moses' body that he had to put a veil over his face.

So Moses has died. And Joshua is looking at the Jordan River and the river is really, really full. It's springtime. Moses had died.

You know, the great leader was no longer with them. The promised land is before them. The river looks unpassable. And the book of Joshua literally begins with an and or a for.

In other words, Deuteronomy ends and literally Joshua is to continue on with this. And so what we have in verses one to nine is Joshua's commissioning and God giving Joshua a talk as to how he, in fact, is going to be successful in doing that which seems to be impossible, crossing the river, conquering the land, dealing with a fearful people and losing the death of the greatest leader that the people of Israel had ever known.

And this is what God says. After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, Moses, my servant, is dead.

[7 : 01] Now, therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people to the land which I am giving to them, the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given you, as I said to Moses.

Now, we just want to pause here for a second. Look at that verse three. He's saying he's going to give the land to them. And he says then, every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given you, as I said to Moses.

What we see there is you have to step out to take the promises of God. This is really, really important. You know, first of all, God promises Joshua success.

He promises God, and we'll look at this more in a moment. He promises, he's going to promise Joshua success. He's going to promise God, Joshua, like literal physical blessing and success. But it isn't then the case that Joshua can say, let's get out the comfy chairs, and let's make some nice big fires, and we're going to have lots of really nice tabbouleh, and we're going to have lots of really nice roast lamb, and we're just going to sit back, and we're going to watch God just do all of this stuff.

[8 : 19] And when God has done all of this stuff, then we'll walk in. You know, the promise of God is connected to them stepping out.

So, as in a sense, their sole of their feet, and it's a very, very earthy image, they actually literally have to be standing there to get it. It's not a matter that you can get out the easy boys and just sort of, you know, somebody will give you the remote, and you just sort of lie there in the easy boy, just sort of waiting for God to zap you with blessing and zap you with blessing and zap you with victory, and then you sort of wander out, and everything just sort of parts before your path.

There's this balance here in the scripture between the promise of God's power and the willingness to step out. In the New Testament, maybe the best example of this principle is when Peter walks on the water.

And many of you have probably read that brilliant book by John Ortberg, which is titled, If You Want to Walk in the Water, You Gotta Get Out of the Boat. And that's really how God's promises work.

If you want to walk on the water, you've got to get out of the boat. And if you want to be able to, if you want to enter into the blessings that God has offered to you, you've got to actually take those steps.

[9 : 42] And in Joshua's case, it meant you take the step towards the impassable river. You march around that impregnable city. You face those unstoppable armies by walking towards them.

And there's this balance between having a trust and a faith in God and literally taking those steps. So God doesn't say, you just stand here and I'll clear 20 steps before your path.

He says, listen, Joshua, you're going to do it. Joshua, you're going to do it. As we'll see later on, be strong and courageous. You're going to do it. Go for it.

Each soul of the sole of your foot has to step here and here and here and here, even in the face of things which seem impossible. So once again, listen to verse three.

Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given you, as I said to Moses. Verse four. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the great sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory.

[10:50] No person, no man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

What a precious verse. And this verse here challenges us. Verse five challenges us to understand what true victory is. Some of you might know that, and he still has a continuing influence in me.

There was a significant period in my life where I went through a significant number of troubles. And a writer by the name of John Maxwell was really important to me.

And one of the things which John Maxwell really pushes all of the time is to challenge us to understand what true success is. And he uses the example that if at the end of the day, you know, at the end of his life, he has built the biggest churches and he has been, you know, really successful financially.

And if all sorts of magazines and other people talk about how great he is. But if he doesn't have his wife beside him who still loves him.

[11:58] And if he doesn't have children who like him and love him, then he has been a failure.

That if he hasn't, in fact, throughout the course of his life, drawn closer to God, even if he's accomplished all of those things, he has been a failure.

And the world measures success in terms of how big your bank account is, how long the obituaries are in the Globe and Mail when you die, and all of these types of things.

And here the scriptures are saying to us, what does success mean? What does success mean?

What does it profit you if you gain the whole world and don't have some of these things here?

And there's three things mentioned here. One of them, obviously, is success, literal earthly success.

No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life.

That's literal earthly success. But then, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. In other words, there is here the talk of a deep, intimate relationship between Joshua and God.

[13:11] And thirdly, I will not leave you nor forsake you, which is the sense of God's presence. So there is, in a sense, intertwined success, in this particular case, earthly success, a close relationship with God, and a conscious dwelling in the presence of God.

And this, in a sense, is to shape what our understanding of success is. You know, it's not a matter for me as a pastor to, you know, to live my life and maybe use human technologies and try to use flattery and try to use persuasion and try to take the path of least resistance.

And, you know, nobody will notice if I don't spend time reading God's word and praying. And nobody will notice if I'm not trying to draw closer to God. At least I can fool myself into thinking about this.

And, you know, you play the church game. You play the religion game. You play the flattery game. You learn how to raise money. And you do all of these types of things. In the eyes of the world, I could be a great success.

But this text is telling me that I have become a huge failure. I have become a huge failure. Because there is no success without drawing ever closer to God.

[14:39] And there is no success without not only drawing ever closer to God, but to understand that I dwell and to live in the knowledge that I dwell in God's presence. And that this becomes something which I am to crave.

Like I am to thirst for. I am to, I am just to feast on. And so this text is challenging us as we make our New Year's resolutions, as we think about church, as we think about our business, as we think about our families, to reconsider what true success is.

Now let's continue. Verse 6. Be strong and of good courage. For to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses, my servant, commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success.

[15 : 58] Just, you know, one of the things, this is one of the things which I, one of the things, when I read this text, I have an odd mind.

And one of the things I read as I was reading this text, I was thinking, how would a Christian in the Sudan read this text? Like, how would a Christian in the Sudan facing unbelievable persecution and oppression and poverty, how would he read this text?

Like, this text, remember earlier on when I said that the text, first of all, challenges us to redefine success? If we redefine success and that we understand that true success always has to involve us drawing closer to God and having a deeper sense of God's presence.

And if we understand that these things, in effect, are the most important things in our life, but ultimately our truly deepest need. And these verses, which I just read, are going to encourage us not to take the way of seeking ever greater personal power and personal ability to get what we want and have other people go along with us getting what we want.

And it's not just in teaching us how to be, you know, richer and more successful and more powerful in the eyes of the world. It is fundamentally calling us to reorient ourselves in terms of that there can be no success unless we submit to God's word.

[17 : 34] We can't have a sense of God's presence if we're not submitting to God's word. That we can't really understand the way that we should go in life unless we are meditating upon God's word.

And I think, you know, for a person in the Sudan, if I was all of a sudden the pastor of a congregation in Sudan, and we were meeting here, and maybe even as we met we would be worried that the army would come and gather us up and throw us in jail or do even far more unimaginably terrible things.

And many of us have lost our crops and are worried about even starving to death. You know, this text is just as much a text for the Sudan as it is for North America.

But the people in the Sudan, what they remind us of and teach us of, is that if, in fact, knowing God is the greatest good, and being faithful to God is the greatest good, and being loyal and obedient to Almighty God is the greatest good, and being submissive to God is the greatest good, than even if they take our property, even if it means we lose our job, even if it means that we lose our life, that, in fact, all of these have just been means by which we show that we are faithful and loving of God, that we are submissive to his word, that we choose him over everything else.

And we get, in that sense, the most wonderful thing. In the moment of our death, we will hear God say, come into my kingdom, my good servant.

[19 : 20] I have been so looking forward to have you be here with me. Well done. Well done. Like, how can we compare having a boss say to us, well done?

Even if, you know, the boss to say to us, well done, means, you know, listen, hide these things in the financial reports, and fire all of these people, and do this and do that and do this, and, you know, be shady here, and be hard-hearted here, and do all of these things.

Then your boss says, well done. How can that compare to coming at the end of your life and hearing God say, you know what, George? You didn't make much money. You didn't make it far in the world.

You know, maybe I'm the pastor of a church in Sudan, and you died at a young age. But well done. Well done. You have been, you have just done, well done.

And how can we compare, how can we value what a boss will say compared to hearing what God would say to us? And so these texts here are not just telling us, I mean, by the blessing and grace and mercy of God, God does not call all of us to martyrdom, and he does not call all of us to sacrifice even our jobs and our livelihoods and faithfulness to him.

[20 : 39] This text continually challenges us. Whether we are the most important person, Paul Martin claims that he is a Christian. Paul Martin is not exempt from meditating upon God's word and learning to live his life according to God's word.

And the lowest street person claims to be a Christian, they are not exempt from having to seek God and try to meditate upon God's word.

If there was any person who could claim that he was going to be far too busy to meditate upon God's word and have far too important affairs of state, and if there was anybody who said, listen, I have to be very, very practical about all of these things, if there was anybody who could make all of these claims, it was Joshua who faced an uncrossable river and multiple enemies ahead of him, and he was going to be very, very busy trying to organize bridge building and organize armies and organize food and organize the economy and organize all of these things, and he'd have no time, and he could easily claim that these practical affairs become the most important, but even to the greatest, God says to Joshua, even to the greatest, my words you shall meditate upon and you shall think upon and my word shall guide you and my word shall form you and you will not stray to the left and you will not stray to the right and you will make it part of your daily discipline.

There is a calling, not just to us being strong and courageous, but to a lifelong meditation upon God's word. And, you know, if you think about this for a second, if, in fact, we regularly submit ourselves to God's word and regularly submit to God's word so that we desire the things that God desires, that we do things the way that God desires us to do these things, then it becomes also just sort of almost unbidden, a natural thing that we will expect God's aid because as we submit to God's word, and that means submitting to the things that he desires us to desire, to flee the things that he says that we should be fleeing, you know, if it just becomes our daily habit, the more it becomes our daily habit, the more natural it will be for us to call out to God for help as we face the uncrossable rivers and the unbelievably powerful enemies that God continues to draw us toward as we capture the land for God that God desires us to do.

And so in this text that we have, verses 7 and 8, three times he is told about God's word, be very strong and very courageous that you may observe and do according to all the law which Moses, my servant, commanded you.

[23 : 36] This is God's word. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left that you may prosper wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.

The third time. For then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success. Just very briefly before we look at verse 9, in this text we have a particular thing which you can pray for me and for the wardens.

Look at verse 8 again. This really struck me yesterday as I was looking at the text. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth. Isn't that odd?

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth. We'd expect him to say from your mind, but he says, or maybe from your eyes because you should be reading it. But he says here, this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth.

That's, I mean, Joshua was not only the lead from God's word, but he was to explain to people God's word so they would understand as well why it is that this was the path that they should be going on.

[24 : 53] And this is a particular warning, I think, to clergy and to bishops and to theologians and to wardens, that the book of the law is to never be far from my mouth, that I am to teach you not George's wisdom, but I am to teach you the word of God, that it is to be always in my mouth as I speak to you.

It is to be that which I always speak. Finally, verse 9. Have I not commanded you, be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Have I not commanded you? Some of you might have heard me singing this. There's a way that I've, years ago, my wife and I, when we traveled in the car, we'd put on these kids' tapes for our kids, and there was a way that you could memorize this verse by singing it.

I won't inflict my singing upon you right now, but I still remember how to sing this, and I sing it so often. Have I not commanded you, be strong and of good courage.

Do not be afraid nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. In 2006, we will face many times when we are going to be afraid, and there are going to be many times when it will be easy for us to turn away.

[26 : 16] But just remember this verse. God has commanded us to move forward into his blessing. God has told us that we are to move forward in such a way that we draw into a closer relationship with him and a greater sense of his presence.

God has commanded us to do these things, and there will be such things that will also involve the building up of congregations and the building up of families and the sharing of the gospel and discipleship and on and on and on.

And there will be so many times that people will oppose us, and there will be so many times when we are to be afraid. And God says, Have I not commanded you, be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. We should go into 2006, confident of God's presence, committed to submitting our lives to God's word, meditating upon it daily, learning from God's word what true success is, and as we submit to God's word and read God's word, trust his presence and his supply, his adequacy for even our deepest fears and needs.

Shall we bow our heads in prayer? Father, we acknowledge before you that sometimes, Father, we're so afraid of even feeling anxiety that once we start to feel any type of anxiety, that we seek fantasies or we seek the bottle or we seek distraction or we seek who knows what, Father, just to turn us from anxiety.

[28 : 12] And we ask, Father, in 2006, as we feel anxious, that you teach us and help us to pray, that you teach us and help us to turn to your word. And we ask, Father, that you help us to develop the daily habit of meditating upon your word and being formed by your word and being submissive and open to your word, that we might learn from your word what true success is, and that, Father, as we read your word, that you will grant us strength and courage and guidance and direction.

We give you thanks and praise, Father, that your desire for us is blessing, that your desire for us is success and victory, that your desire for us is to draw closer to you, that your desire for us is to have a greater sense of your presence.

Father, we give you thanks and praise that we do not have to convince you of these things, but that we have to learn to live in these things which are your will for us.

And so, Father, we ask in 2006 that you help us to live in accordance with your will, trusting your desire to bless us and stepping forward boldly towards greater blessing, greater knowledge of you. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen. We'll continue in our prayer.