

The Sovereignty of God (2): Joshua

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[0 : 00] It would seem that many of you are of the snowflake generation.

No more Gen Xers, no more baby boomers. These are the days of the snowflakes. According to the Collins Dictionary, I always use Collins Dictionary, you know, because that's my name.

Okay, snowflakes are the generation of people who became adults in the 2010s. They are viewed as being less resilient and more prone to taking offense than previous generations.

Well, I'll certainly not argue with the second descriptor of that definition. In general, today's young adults don't know the difference between disagreement and offense. Just because I don't agree with you does not mean to say that I hate you or I'm trying to offend you.

But I would want to argue with the first descriptor in that definition. I see no sign that today's young adults are any more or less resilient than those of a previous generation.

[1 : 13] Because let's face it, whether we are 18 years old or 80 years old, we all have limits of endurance beyond which we cannot go.

Now, your limits might be higher than mine, but I don't see any evidence for our limits necessarily being based upon our age. I'm sorry, but the evangelical nicety that says God will never give you more than you can bear is neither true to scripture nor to experience.

Sometimes God gives you way more than you can bear. This is true whether you're 18 or whether you're 80. Some of the most resilient people I have met belong to this so-called snowflake generation.

So enough of the generalizations. Whatever the generation you were born into, you need the resilience that only the grace of Christ can give you to deal with things God has given you which are beyond your ability to bear.

Whatever your age, you need to know that when you feel out of control, your heavenly father knows what he's doing and he continues to lovingly provide grace to help in your time of need.

[2 : 41] Now, Joshua lived 3,500 years before sociologists started talking about Gen Xers or Millennials or Snowflakes. Do you think it was any easier for him when in Joshua chapter 1, God commands him to accomplish a task that is way beyond his skill set or inner resources?

After 40 years of wandering through the desert, Joshua is commanded to cross the River Jordan from the east to the west to lead the Israelites in battle against the indigenous peoples of Canaan. They're outnumbered. They're outgunned. They're fighting in unfamiliar terrain. Make no mistake, God is commanding Joshua to accomplish a task which is far beyond him.

Something greater than he can bear. There are many in our church unknown to us who at this very moment are getting from God more than they can bear.

far more than they can bear. And again, remember that your limits may be higher than mine and mine may be higher than yours. So what is beyond me may not be beyond you and vice versa.

[3 : 59] I can cope with pressures you can't cope with. And you can cope with pressures that would crush me stone dead. But there are times for every one of us, are there not, when God gives us more than we can bear.

Maybe not more than others can bear, but more than we can bear. And at times like these, we need the resilience the so-called snowflake generation do not possess, although in reality they do.

As we emerge from this pandemic, we need to tap into the resilience and courage of Joshua, who's called to go way beyond his own abilities.

And in these verses, we learn the not-so-hidden secret of his resilience. First of all, the timeless promises of God's sovereignty, and then secondly, the daily practice of God's sovereignty.

Spoiler alert for you all. The not-so-hidden secret of resilience in the Christian life is your dogged reliance upon the sovereignty of God in your situation.

[5 : 16] That though you may feel out of your depth, he is not. He is not. First of all then, the timeless promise, timeless promise of God's sovereignty.

Timeless promise of God's sovereignty. Joshua faces an impossible task. In verse 2, God commands him, saying, Arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people. God's commanded him to do something that he just can't do. He knows about the enemy he's going to have to fight. It is numerous.

It is technologically advanced. And it has the advantage of fighting on familiar ground. However, what gives Joshua the confidence to obey are the timeless promises of the sovereignty of God. Promises which are greater than any strategy. And you too have impossible tasks. For example, the task of living brightly for Jesus in an apathetic secular age.

[6 : 32] That's impossible. Or another one. The task of putting sin to death and pursuing the grace of holiness while all the time having a doubting, tempted heart.

That's another impossible task. But we too have the timeless promises of God's sovereignty upon which to cling when we're finding it difficult to cope.

You know, in so many different ways, we're not really so different from Joshua, you know. But of course, in theological ways, we're a million miles away from him.

Because our New Testament, Joshua, whose name is Jesus, has already conquered all our enemies. and his grace is our victory.

So, while we're not so different from Joshua, we have got so many advantages compared to him. And in our passage here in Joshua 1, we have three promises of God's sovereignty to which we may cling.

[7 : 41] First, the promise of God, then the power of God, and then the presence of God. First of all, the promise of God.

In human terms, Joshua would be utterly mad to march his people across the Jordan and begin a campaign of military conquest by attrition.

There is no logic to this because by any measurement he faces defeat. But he has God's promise. In verse 2, having commanded Joshua to go, God now tells him where, into the land I'm giving to them, to the people of Israel.

God is giving this land to them. But then he goes even deeper in verse 3 and God says to him, every place that the sole of your foot treads upon, I have given to you just as I promised to Moses. Not only in verse 2 is God giving this land to Joshua and Israel, but in verse 3 we learn he's already given them this land.

[8 : 59] It's the done deal. The conquest is not uncertain. It doesn't hang in the balance. It is a certainty because God has promised the victory.

Joshua and the people may be feeling rather unprepared, but God's been preparing the fulfillment of this promise for many thousands of years. Joshua's got a promise from God.

Not a promise he has dreamed up or found somewhere in a cave or as a figment of his imagination. He has a sure uncertain promise from the mouth of God himself.

God has already given the land to the people. And the promise is just as sure for Joshua as he stands on the east bank of the river Jordan as it will be when Joshua and his people finally conquer the land of Israel.

That's the thing about the promises of God that we've got to get into our heads. they are sure, they are certain, they are a done deal.

[10 : 07] God always keeps his promises. So when he makes a promise to us, it is as good as done. Many older Christians used to have what was called a promise box.

The promise box contained 365 written promises from God's word, one for every day of the year. The idea is that you drew out a new promise to give you strength to overcome whatever happened to you that day.

Each of these 365 promises in that promise box were as sure and certain as the mountains. But this promise, this promise Joshua had from God, the promise of God's sovereign gift to the land, as far as he was concerned, was the greatest of them all.

This conquest isn't uncertain. It doesn't hang in the balance. It's a certainty because God has promised it. One of the reasons that we want to invest in studying the Bible is that we want to learn the promises of God.

We want to learn them so that we can apply them into challenging situations in our lives. God is sovereign. He is in control. He's not out of his depth.

[11 : 32] And faith in his royal promises brings deep assurance and resilient strength. You want to try and cope in a chaotic, anarchic world without God and his promises?

Well, good luck to you. you want to cope in a world where God is on the throne and he promises grace to his people?

Then trust and believe his promises. So, for example, Matthew 11, 28, Jesus says, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Colin Mackay prayed so beautifully from this verse on Wednesday evening at our meeting. Surely, this is a priceless promise for those of us who are weary and weighed down with guilt and with pressures and with worries.

And Jesus says, there's rest for you in me. And it's my gift. It's a gift of my sovereign grace to you. And in the heart of a perfect storm, I'll give you rest in me.

[12 : 52] Is that not a promise that we can claim for ourselves and cling to when we're at an end of our own resources, when we're out of our depth? We hear the voice of the Lord calling to us, come, lay down thy weary soul upon my weary breast, upon my sacred breast.

We have the promise of God. Second, the power of God. The power of God. Now, the people against whom Joshua must fight are technologically advanced, they are well equipped, they are numerous, and they are familiar with the land.

Joshua and the Israelites have been commanded to do something that's way beyond their ability to do. It is simply not true that God never gives us more than we can bear.

Sometimes, he gives us way more than we can bear. But when he does, it's because he wants us to learn how resourceful, gracious, and powerful he is.

And therefore, how we can trust him to provide for us when we're out of our depth. Well, back to Adon to Joshua. He is standing wide-eyed before the impossible task that God has set him to achieve.

[14 : 21] Oh, yes, he knows that this Canaan into which he is to march is the promised land, so-called because God had promised it to them through Moses. But he also hears the voice of God saying to him, No man, verse 5, shall be able to stand before you.

Just as I was with Moses, so will I be with you. The power of God will go with them across the Jordan and into the fight. And yes, with them, but more importantly, before them.

Left to themselves, the Israelites would fail in this God-given task. but they aren't left to themselves because God's power goes with them and before them into war. Have you reckoned with that infinite, eternal, and unchangeable power recently?

That power which created the universe with the word and raised Jesus from the dead? And what was it the apostle Paul heard from the mouth of Christ himself?

My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in your weakness. Joshua here stands on the banks of the Jordan and he shakes his head at the impossibility of the task God has set for him.

[15 : 46] But it is then God assures him of his power at work in Joshua's weakness. And yes, that sovereign power is available to each one of us to face the impossibilities of our lives whatever they may be.

The grace that is sufficient for you in any and every situation. Even those situations, perhaps especially those situations where God has given you more than you can bear.

Where you've gone beyond the limits of your endurance. it is such great power. But according to the apostle in Ephesians 3.20 it's at work within us.

The promise of God, the power of God and then thirdly the presence of God. The presence of God. Give us the promises of God.

Give us the power of God and that all for nothing lest we have unless we have the presence of God. For this is what more than anything else will keep our heads above water when we're out of our depth.

[17 : 08] For 40 years the Israelites had been wandering in the desert and God had been with them. He showed himself to them by virtue of a great pillar of cloud by day and a great pillar of fire by night.

He was with them in that tent of meeting and in that golden chest they called the Ark of the Covenant. They'd seen him in Mount Sinai in great clouds and in lightning they'd heard him in claps

of thunder and the deafening sound of trumpets.

For 40 years as they wandered on the eastern side of the river Jordan in the desert they had known God was with them. But now God is calling upon them to migrate across the river and to occupy all the lands to the west of the Jordan.

Will God go with them there also? Will God go with them into the unfamiliar land and territory of warlike tribes and hostile peoples?

and then Joshua hears the voice of God assuring him saying I will not leave you. I will not forsake you.

[18 : 23] The Lord your God is with you wherever you go. I've been with you for 40 years as you've marched to the desert and now as you march into the unfamiliar daunting territory of this land I promise to give you I'll be with you there also.

And you know I know it sounds twee to say I know it's easy to say. God does go with us into the unfamiliar territory of new and terrifying circumstances.

God always goes with us when we're drowning in the depths beyond the limits of our endurance. In fact it's often there we find him in a very special way.

Like King David found him in the valley of the shadow of death when in a moment of inspired brilliance the shepherd king said I will fear no evil for thou art with me.

he's the sovereign God who's not just all powerful but he's all present. It may be unfamiliar territory to us where you are right now but you need to know that God's already there.

[19 : 45] He's preparing our way and surely his presence in that storm brings us a quiet spirit because if God be for us who can be against us?

There's a sense in which we're all staring down the barrel of an uncertain future. Who knows what that undiscovered country we call tomorrow will look like or how it will feel.

If it wasn't for the sovereignty of the God of promise power and presence we'd all go clean mad.

The Jesus who is the fulfillment of the promise of God the gospel which is God's power unto salvation the Holy Spirit who is Jesus constant presence with us only here you know in the Father's love in the Son's grace and in the Spirit's fellowship are we truly tapping into resilience and strength of Joshua only here there is strength in the sovereignty of God for snowflakes like us.

Secondly and more briefly I want to consider with you the daily practice of the sovereignty of God the daily practice of God's sovereignty to whatever generation we belong we all have snowflake tendencies when faced with tasks which are impossible for us to complete living for Christ in a secular age coping with mental illness physical disability broken relationships grief loneliness these are often beyond our ability to bear but we have God's sovereign promises do we not?

We have something our non-Christian friends can't see, can't touch, can't rely on but how can we daily live in the light of these promises so that like Joshua standing on the east bank of the Jordan looking west at the impossible task God has set him we can have confidence that what God calls us to do he will equip us to do seems to me from this passage that we can answer this at three levels faith fill and fight faith fill and fight now remember the reason we're studying this passage tonight that as we emerge from this pandemic into a new world and it is a new world the uncertainties the future holds for us aren't something to be anxious about or to worry about rather they are precious opportunities for us to see God's sovereignty at work in our lives in the life of our church and in the life of our world first faith faith if a promise from God is like a key then our faith is the hand that turns the key you can't you can put a key in a lock and it wouldn't open the door because you have to turn the key and engage the locking mechanism the key must be turned if the door is to be opened and faith is the hand that turns the key

[23 : 23] Joshua has been given the sovereign promise by God the question is not whether God will keep his promise to Joshua the question is whether Joshua will believe God we read that after after God had made promises to Abraham the father of the Jewish nation Abraham believed God and God credited to him as righteousness and now Joshua has been challenged to do the same to put his hand to the key turn the lock believe God and his promises promise and faith go hand in hand they must God's promise and our faith perhaps there are certain people you have learned by bitter experience you cannot trust so that when they say something to you you say inside yourself to them

I don't believe a word you say but tell me has God ever proved himself false to any promise he has ever made he rescued his people from Egypt and provided for them for 40 years in the desert can he be trusted to keep his sovereign promises to you you you beg your bottom dollar he can do you

believe that if you confess your sins he is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness do you believe he'll be with you in trouble do you believe that Jesus Christ has sent his spirit to comfort you and to strengthen you and that his grace is sufficient for you in any and every situation yes even those which are beyond your ability to endure yes of course we believe these do we not very often and this is hard for us to understand God sovereignly chooses to condition the fulfillment of his promise upon our faith he sovereignly chooses to condition the fulfillment of his promise upon our faith the ultimate question for

Joshua and for us is this do we believe God in the light of the cross how can we not faith the second fill fill that's f-i-l-l not p-h-i-l a significant percentage of this passage is given over to Joshua God rather commanding Joshua and the people to fill their minds and hearts with his word in verse 8 he says to them this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth you shall meditate on it day and night in other words as Joshua and his army are marching across the Jordan into Canaan their songs are to be scripture if they're to succeed in their mission God's commanding them to be filled with the book of this law namely the book that the record Moses set down in the first five books of the Bible let your hearts be filled with this fill your minds with

God's creation narrative fill your hearts with God's salvation of Noah fill your minds with God's establishing of your nation under Abraham God's rescue of your nation under Joseph as we saw last Sunday evening fill your hearts as you walk across the Jordan with the story of the Exodus how God delivered your forefathers from their slavery in Egypt and how he has been with you ever since for us as New Testament believers the imperative is even stronger fill your minds and hearts with the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ fill your minds and hearts with the gospel of his free grace and the promises of his power and his presence with you by his spirit as it was once said of Charles Spurgeon let your blood run bibline Jesus prayed in John 17 Lord sanctify them by the truth your word is truth let me ask you young people especially what is your relationship with the Bible like are you devoted to undisciplined in reading studying memorizing and meditating upon scripture especially those portions which relate most directly to the gospel of our Lord and the benefits of his cross and resurrection the great

Elizabeth Elliot once said such good common sense from Elizabeth Elliot who of course had her own tragedies in life to deal with when her husband Jim Elliot was martyred for his faith in Christ she wrote these words if you dwell on your own feelings about things rather than dwelling on the faithfulness the love and the mercy of God then you're likely to have a terrible horrible no good very bad day our feelings are very fleeting aren't they we can't depend upon them for five minutes at a time but dwelling on the love faithfulness and mercy of God is always safe dwelling on the love faithfulness and mercy of God is always safe fill your minds and your hearts with scripture and it'll squeeze out anxiety and worry and then lastly the third way to daily practice

[29 : 41] God's sovereignty fight fight I don't know where this attitude of let go and let God came from certainly not the Bible Joshua knew that God's sovereign promises were with him as he crossed the Jordan but he also knew that he and his people were going to have to fight that's why in our passage on three occasions God commands Joshua to be strong and courageous verse six verse seven verse nine again in verse nine God says to Joshua do not be frightened do not be dismayed these are all active verbs in the original Hebrew text in other words they're things Joshua is going to have to do God will not do these things for Joshua based upon the sovereign promises of God Joshua is going to have to do these things himself in this politically correct age

I don't want to offend anyone I'll let the apostle Paul do that for me in first Corinthians 16 verse 13 Paul commands the under pressure Christians at Corinth saying be watchful stand firm in the faith act like men be strong be a man don't give in to the secularism of this age don't don't waver in your opposition to temptation don't crumble before those situations in life which are beyond your ability to bear be a man fight against all these things with all the weaponry of God's promises and all the strength of his grace you know what I'm not a snowflake generation was born way too early for the snowflakes but when it goes when it comes to our ability to endure things which are beyond our ability to bear what all snowflakes every one of us it's the daily practice of the sovereignty of God that makes the difference to us all believe

God's promise fill your minds with scripture and wage war against your unbelief and your anxiety this is the word of God for you this evening now go and do for my you you you you you you you you you