

Be Strong

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[0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that we can go into a different part tonight. And we pray that as we grapple with the Old Testament and stories from a long time ago, that you would speak to us in a fresh way by your spirit right now and grow us in our encouragement and our service of you.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to be political tonight. How's that? Don't do that too often. Prime ministers of Australia have been coming and going through a revolving door for the last five years.

That's stating the obvious. And I thought before I finished this sermon that we might even have another one, but it hasn't happened at this stage. But it's led to an insecurity and a lack of confidence in decision makers, and it's not good for our country.

It's not good for our democracy. If it has become a tyranny of vested interests or selfish people who just spin that revolving door and keep it spinning. When a leader changes, we go from the known to the unknown.

We move into a new era with new hopes and also new uncertainties. So tonight, as you know, we're in Joshua. We're in the sixth book of the Bible.

[1 : 1 1] It comes immediately after the first five books of the Bible, which are known as the Torah, the law. And it's the first of what we call the former prophets. And there's a huge transition taking place, which we've already read about in the Bible readings tonight.

A deeply revered leader, Moses, has died, and a new leader steps onto the stage. And so there's these new questions, there's new hopes, and there's new uncertainties.

And Joshua begins with these words. After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' aid, Moses, my servant, is dead.

There's a baton change going on. The great God anointed and appointed leader of the people of Israel is dead. Moses was raised in the household of the Egyptian king.

He was a prince of Egypt. He's probably the foremost leader of the Jews in the whole of the Old Testament. He was a reluctant leader.

[2 : 1 8] When God first knocked on his door and asked him to lead, Moses said, please find somebody other than me. Don't take me, Lord. And yet he was the man who had confronted the king, Pharaoh, on numerous occasions with the word and the power of God until the Egyptian king finally permitted the Israelites to leave Egypt with the last terrible plague.

Get out of my sight and never come back again. And Moses led the nation through the Red Sea. The Egyptian army tried to follow.

God closed the sea over them. He drowned the army and they were totally destroyed. The Israelites continued on what was a reasonably short journey of a few weeks.

It only took a few weeks to get to the edge of the promised land. They arrived there. They're on the brink of the place that God is bringing them to and they blew it. They sent spies into the land.

And the spies returned with a mixed report. They said, yes, it's a great land. It's flowing with good things. It's got milk and honey and all the things that God promised that there would be, just like God said.

[3 : 32] But it's full of giants. And these guys are so big that we feel like grasshoppers in comparison to them. I was on holidays before Christmas.

Four days on a houseboat on the beautiful Myo Lakes. Never been there in my life before. Pristine beauty. I was very excited about going. Warm water.

Unlimited swimming. You know, all day in and out of the water. And just before I went, one of my friends very kindly said to me, he said, oh, watch out for the bull sharks. No, it wasn't, sorry.

He wouldn't have done such a thing. And suddenly, four days on a boat and not being able to go into the water didn't sound very nice at all. And I said to my friend, I think the bull shark stuff is a lot of bull dust.

And I found out afterwards it was. There were no bull sharks in Myo Lake. He was wrong. But what had happened was his warning had put fear into me.

[4 : 35] And uncertainty. And I was wondering, I was actually wondering why we didn't go on the Hawkesbury River in the first place. We wouldn't have had to drive so far. There are bull sharks and other sharks there.

It's the same with the Israelites. Ten spies came back. They're telling giant stories. And the people become very afraid. And in their fear, it's almost like they've got amnesia.

They've forgotten what God's just done for them. They've forgotten the big signs in Egypt. I mean, how big a miracle does God have to do for people to remember how great he is? And he does ten of them in Egypt.

And then he brings them through the Red Sea and drowns the army on top of that. But they forget. And they stop trusting him. And they begin to accuse him. And they say, what have you done bringing us to this place?

We're all going to die. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, have a very different perspective. Don't worry about the giants.

[5 : 36] God can take care of them. And so you've got two groups. They've gone and seen the same things. They face the same situation, but each deals with it in a completely different way.

One group is filled with fear and can't get away quick enough. And the other group have this really big sense of God. They're confident in God. They trust his leadership of them, even in the face of giants.

And if we read a whole lot of the Bible, we would see that God punishes the nations for their unbelief, for the nation for their unbelief.

They wander in the desert like refugees without a home until all the adult men of that generation die for their unfaithfulness. And so now, 40 years later, there are only two survivors, Joshua and Caleb, and they are both about 80 years old.

Moses is dead. He's not allowed to enter the land. That's another big story. A generation has died out. God takes one great leader off the scene.

[6 : 46] The nation really has lost a colossal leader, and the people are very grieved. But Joshua begins with a new leader.

And I guess the questions are, what's he going to be like? Will he take us in? Will we defeat giants? Should we trust in him? Will he prove worthy? It's funny, you know, for all of us, life is short.

We will all depart the stage of human history. And as we go, and you see it with older people particularly, with older people they may have had a pretty substantial life and done a lot of things, and a lot of things that you probably remember and honour at a funeral service, but they will go and a family will be left behind.

And some of the questions which become real questions for the people left behind are, so what's going to happen to us? And what will our future be like now that this person is no longer part of our life?

And God gives great reassurance to the new leader, and I think that's what the whole of Joshua chapter 1 is about.

[7 : 59] It's God's reassurance to the people at this significant point in their history. Verse 2.

And what you see there, if you listen very carefully, is that the Israelites' real leader has always been God.

He's working his purposes. He's pulling the strings. He provides the real power and the leadership.

Verse 2. The land is what I am about to give them. And verse 3. I will give you what I promised Moses. And God promises this vast area of land which stretches all the way from the Mediterranean Sea right through to modern Iraq and Iran.

And they're not new promises. These are promises which God has made time and time again in the past. He's made the promises to Abraham in Genesis 15. He's made the promises to Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 1.

[9 : 44] And in verse 5, God says, Just like I was with Moses, I will be with you. I will never leave you or forsake you.

God is present and leading his people. He is still on mission. And so he's giving great reassurance to Joshua and also to the people.

Be assured, God is with us. He continues to lead us. His promises assure. His purposes continue. And Joshua is God's new man.

His Hebrew name means rescuer or saviour. It's the same name as Jesus in the Greek. I've changed my verse tonight and I've gone to Luke chapter 2 verse 12 where the angels announce the birth of Jesus and they say, Christ is a saviour.

Christ is a saviour. Christ is a rescuer. Joshua will be a rescuer in terms of God's purposes, bringing God's people into the land.

[11 : 06] And then he reassures his people throughout these words at the beginning of Joshua.

The reassurance is, I am with you. You're not alone. It's the same sort of reassurance which is given again and again throughout the Bible. In the New Testament, in John's Gospel, Jesus alarms his disciples when he says, I'm going away.

And they're distressed. And he reassures them in John 16, 16. He said, I will ask the Father and he will give you another counsellor to be with you forever, the spirit of truth.

But you know him for he lives with you and he will be in you. And I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. In Matthew 28, Jesus does exactly the same things.

The very last words that he speaks to his disciples before he goes up into heaven, I am with you always to the very end of the age. He promises his presence.

[12 : 09] We can feel very frightened and lonely in tough times. Very uncertain of what's going on around us and uncertain of what lies ahead.

Sometimes devastated by our own sin, sometimes devastatingly impacted by the sin of others. Believers do shed tears and in some places in the world we even shed blood.

Nowhere in the scriptures are we promised an easy road. But what we can be sure of and always confident about is the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in every situation that we face.

I thought about this this morning. You know, when you're older, one of the things that you know is coming is declining health and death.

It's going to come sometime. And when you're younger, you don't think about it as often, but when you're older and you see your friends dropping off around you, it becomes almost the norm.

[13 : 25] Others of you are still in high school or maybe just out at the end of high school and so life issues are quite different for you. You have uncertainty about the future. You struggle with issues in your family.

You see grief with mothers and fathers and families. You have big life decisions coming ahead. You're wondering about what you'll study. You're wondering about what career that you will do.

You're wondering about whether you'll be married, whether you'll have a family, what that will look like. And somewhere in between, a few of the rest of us fit and we've been living long enough to know that some of the things that we planned for and we hoped for haven't come and some of the things that have happened to us are not things that we've welcomed.

Life can be really difficult sometimes. Illness or illness in a loved one, in a child or in a spouse, experiencing death in close family, maybe it's walking through times of moral failure or difficulties in our workplace.

God does not promise to get us out of trouble. He promises his personal presence in every circumstance of life. You see it when we have marriages, ceremonies here in church.

[14 : 44] At the beginning of a marriage, you know, two people stand here, hopefully head over heels in love. That's what it's like most of the time. Maybe very stressed by the arrangements of a wedding, but head over heels in love and absolutely anxious to start to build a life together and be together.

And at the heart of a service, the two people will make promises to one another. They read promises which recognise the ups and downs of the journey which is still out there ahead of them.

And they'll say to each other, I take you for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.

But you commit yourself as a friend to one another in that moment and the point is that you have a friend which undertakes to enter into the journey of life with you.

A real presence, a deep comforter when it works right. And so Joshua begins with God saying, I am with you.

[15 : 57] You're not alone. He has a powerful presence with his people on the journey of life. His promises and his purposes continue. But a word from God, a promise from God, always requires a response from the people that it's spoken to.

Three times God says to Joshua, be strong, be courageous, don't be afraid. And in verse 18, the people respond by asking their leader to be strong and courageous as well.

And it's not like grin and bear it and battle through British stiff upper lip stoicism. It's about having the courage to trust the word of God completely and to act on it.

To rest in what God asks him to do, to be faithful to what God says. God's word says to him, verse 7, be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you.

Do not turn from it to the right or to the left that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth, meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything that's written in it and then you will be prosperous and successful.

[17 : 15] This is not a book of rules and regulations. This is the book by which they relate in a living way with the living God. The scriptures were the law. This was their Bible. This is about knowing God.

And God gives Joshua all that he needs for the task ahead. He says, I'm with you. Trust me. Trust my word. Do what I tell you to do and don't listen to anything or anybody else. They are about to enter a land of giants.

Fearsome enemies, tough opponents and God says, don't be terrified, don't be discouraged, trust what I say completely. Now when a preacher says something like that to a congregation of God's people, most people just sit there and nod their heads and say, yeah, yeah, yeah, we've got to do what God tells us to do.

Of course we do that. Pay careful attention to God's word. Well, what's that look like? And it's really interesting because you jump into the New Testament, you go to a passage like Hebrews 13 and he actually picks up on Joshua 1 and applies it to God's people in a Christian setting.

So in Hebrews 13, he says, marriage should be honoured by all and the marriage bed kept pure for God will judge the adulterer and all sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God has said, never will I leave you or forsake you.

[18 : 41] And so we can say with confidence, the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid, what can people do to me? See, God's presence with us should be impacting our behaviour.

To know Christ should be changing the way that we are and the way that we live and the people that we are. Honour marriage, keep the marriage bed pure. Keep your lives free from love of money.

Be content with what you have. The reason to honour God in these things in matters of relationship and money is God's faithfulness to us and his presence with us.

God's given us his word. We know what he thinks about the idols of sex and money. Preacher a while back said, we live in a sex sodden society. He's right, I saw a movie last night which I'll tell you afterwards if you want to know but it was a movie that I thought would have been a great movie to see and it was for most of us if you like seeing people blown away.

That sort of light relief for me sometimes. Mightn't be good for you. But something happened at the end of that movie that shocked me and it was like the pornification of our culture.

[19 : 56] It's like bringing porn into mainstream. Some of us have been burnt or hurt by our own sexual failures or the failures of others against us.

Our society ridicules what God teaches about marriage and fidelity. The organised church wanders like a drunken man trying to find his way home over issues such as gay marriage and practising gay ministers.

We've moved a long way from God's word. we are more likely to say each to his own than to hold to what is clear teaching in the scriptures. That's sex and relationships.

What about possessions? We're possessed by them. If we own homes we want the Sydney property market to boom. If you don't own a home you don't mind if it crashes a bit.

I tried that in one of our church families this morning I don't think they saw the humour of what I was trying to say. I think that was shocking. But we feel security in our wealth.

[21 : 07] Gives us status. Reassurance about who we are. We feel powerful because we can travel business class. Or we can die in a five star nursing home.

How good is that? We have lots of stuff but we are restless and discontent and never satisfied.

And it's a spiritual problem. See when we turn to money or we misuse sex I think we're trying to fill deep emptiness inside. More porn a new sexual partner great wealth and the things that I can do and buy and we're trying to fill this hole that only Jesus can truly satisfy.

We had a lovely experience this week at church. Somebody from one of our church families morning church was serving in the school and on the counter.

They were a great public face for our church. and she was telling the story of her conversion. She's come from Iran and she was converted in India. A friend talked to her about Jesus and she came to Christ and she said I fell in love with Jesus.

[22 : 27] I fell in love with Jesus and boy he shines out of her. The Lord Jesus richly invites us into his personal presence and into relationship with him.

He says to us in Matthew 11 come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

The people of Israel have been brought to a brand new day. God has dealt with the offenses of their past. He's given them the opportunity to enjoy new life with him in this brand new land and yes there are lots of things that they could be afraid about but God speaks to their situation and he says I am with you I will never leave you and never forsake you and then he calls them to make a strong and trusting response to him be strong be courageous don't be afraid the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go and brothers and sisters I have no idea what giants you are facing in your life right now and I am sure amongst us even a congregation this size that some of us have very large giants staring them down but this passage says don't try to satisfy your own hearts with things that cause greater heartache make righteous choices pursue the Lord

Jesus in love be strong be courageous continue to cling to the Lord Jesus who says I am with you always to the very end of the age the Lord Jesus who is with us is greater than every giant that makes us fear Amen