

Be strong and courageous

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Date: 06 September 2020

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[0:00] Good morning. Our reading this morning is the Lord's command to Joshua, the beginning of the book of Joshua. I'm reading Joshua chapter 1, the first 11 verses.

After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' assistant, Moses, my servant, is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them, to the Israelites.

I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates, or the Hittite country to the great sea on the west.

No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous.

[1:20] 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 written in it.

Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified.

Do not be discouraged. For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. So Joshua ordered the officers of the people, Go through the camp and tell the people, Get your supplies ready.

Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own. We thank the Lord for his precious word.

[2:24] Amen. Well, I wonder how you would describe yourself. Strong and courageous. Or perhaps a bit fearful in the days we're living in.

Or maybe a mixture of the two. In our text this morning, the Lord spoke and speaks to Joshua, addressing his fears head on, and reveals to Joshua why he has every reason to be courageous. Let's pray and ask the Lord to speak to us as he spoke to Joshua. Lord, as we hear your word this morning, Please quell our fears.

And lead us as you did Joshua to become mighty men and women of God in these days so full of turmoil and uncertainty. Amen.

Well, let's remind ourselves of the story so far. Once again, Joshua finds himself right on the verge of the promised land.

[3:35] It happened some 40 years earlier when the people of Israel had believed that their God was just too small and the Canaanites were just too big.

And so they ended up walking in circles in the wilderness. Fear was sowed in their hearts by a negative report by 10 of the spies. The people failed to listen to the promise of God and to the other two spies, Caleb and Joshua, who brought a good report.

How tragic it was that so much time had been wasted. In fact, not one of the adults who had stood on the verge of the Jordan 40 years previously was standing there now other than Caleb and Joshua.

Everyone had died in the wilderness. As Joshua stands looking to cross the River Jordan, the river is full.

In fact, we discover in Joshua 3, 15, that the river is in full flood. Surely this is the wrong time to be attempting to cross, to go into the land.

[4:52] Additionally, Moses is dead, that great leader. The stakes could not be higher. The river is in full flood. And the servant of God, Moses, is dead.

And even if Joshua is successful in getting across the river, he's got to face the enemy in the land with a young nation with no military experience.

You could describe what is before Joshua as mission impossible. From a human perspective, Joshua had every reason to be fearful.

Many of us, many of you may well be nursing fears today. At times, I have to say over the last five months, Christian ministry has seemed at times to be mission impossible.

How does God address Joshua? How does Joshua step out of fear? And what helps him to see past the problems and the fears to understand the deep purposes of God?

[5:58] Firstly, God's promises. God speaks to Joshua and reminds him of his glorious promises. Now, God makes many promises in the Bible.

But one of those promises is emphasized to Joshua. The promise is given, remember, to the people of Israel who had been enslaved in Egypt.

The promise is given to Israel who wandered as nomads in the wilderness for 40 years with no place to call home. The promise that is given is the promise of a land, a land of their own.

Now, we probably take for granted the fact of this wonderful land of Britain. But if we were a refugee, we would think very differently. So when the promise comes, as it does in verse 3, where God says, I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.

It's a wonderful promise. Now, Moses may have died, but God's promises are firm, and they are given again to Joshua.

[7:06] Verse 6, you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors. Remember those ancestors? Abraham, those promises to Abraham are now coming to Joshua, and he will be the one walking in to the promised land.

And even again in verse 11, just in case he hadn't heard the promise, this is what God says. It's three days from now, you will cross the Jordan, and you will go in and you will take possession of the land the Lord is giving you for your own.

Now, friends, as the only true landlord of every square inch of this entire world, God is the rightful owner, and he is giving the land to Israel for this period of time.

Joshua's calling to take the land will involve military engagement. We might think that the best preparation for Joshua at this time is to study military strategy.

You won't have noticed that in your text. Surprisingly, in preparation and in sustenance for the task ahead, we have a different guidance coming from God.

[8:17] Instead, Joshua is commanded to obey God's law, to meditate on God's word day and night, verse 8. We see it by God's word.

By God's word, God's purposes will be fulfilled. This is why it is so crucial that Joshua is spending time in God's word, even when it seems like there are so many other things to do.

I wonder if that's a word for us too. Joshua needs to take hold on God's promises and commands so he can walk in God's ways and see God's word come to fulfillment.

So firstly, our text says that his fears will be dispelled when he allows God's word and his promises to fill his mind and to shape his life.

Secondly, God promises that he will be with Joshua as he has been with Moses. When God is with you, everything changes.

[9:25] And he makes the point repeatedly. Verse 5. No one will be able to stand against you. I will be with you. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you, says the Lord to Joshua.

Verse 9. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Through the Jordan, into the land, doing exploits for the Lord God Almighty.

Joshua is told that the God of angel armies will be with him. Of course he doesn't need to be afraid. Indeed, Paul in Romans 8.31 says to you and to me, if God is for you, who can be against you?

There was no need for Joshua to fear. And we have no need to be fearful people. We are loved and provided for by God.

There is no place for fear in the light of God's glorious, powerful, awesome, holy presence. Joshua is given two priceless gifts.

[10:42] Two powerful gifts. God's promises and God's beautiful, holy presence with him. With these gifts, the challenge is not too great.

The river not too wide. The enemy not too powerful. For Joshua, for you or for me. But without these gifts, it's impossible.

It is mission impossible. This is why God says to Joshua, given that it is possible with the promises and the presence.

He says in verse six, be strong and courageous. And just in case he missed it, in verse seven, he says, be strong and very courageous.

And then finally in verse nine, it comes again. Be strong and courageous. Because of course, Joshua has every reason to be strong in the Lord and be courageous going into the land and into all that God has promised with the angel armies of the Lord standing by Joshua's side.

[11:53] Now, you'll notice that Joshua is not asked whether he would like to be strong and courageous. It comes as a command. Be strong and courageous.

Not because you're strong. Because the Lord your God is with you. Joshua's strength in God and courage is seen when he calls his people to prepare to go into the land.

He has made a choice in his head and in his heart to trust in God's promises rather than to remain on the banks of the river in his fears.

The promises of God are like checks. They're great to receive, but they do need to be banked and acted on if we're to benefit from them.

How foolish we would be to have a check and just keep on looking at it and saying, isn't it a lovely check? And not actually benefit from it? To not actually cash it in, if you like.

[12:57] As Martin Luther said, to have faith is saying, yes, this is for me. And I'm going to act upon it. Faith says yes to God's presence and invites him into our lives.

And in the light of his presence, everything is changed. Faith says yes to God's promises, even when we can't see how they can come to be.

Faith says yes to God's grace and to God's power. I wonder if you said yes to God again afresh. Joshua said yes to God and it worked out in action, as we'll see in the coming weeks. Wonderful action. Joshua was commanded to be strong and courageous and he was in the strength that God gave him and he entered into the promised land.

Jesus, our wonderful savior, was strong and courageous in the face of awful sin, death and the enemy Satan.

[14:08] He bore us in on the cross and because of his courage, because of his strength in his God, we now can know the promises and the presence of God ourselves.

We, like Joshua, are called to be strong in the Lord and courageous in our day. Now this last week, I was so encouraged to hear of a story of one of our members of the fellowship.

George had gone to pray on the rye and was sitting in the middle of the grass, right in the middle of the rye. He was reading and meditating on a psalm and a young man came towards him on a bike. George felt compelled of the Lord to stop him and to share with him the passage he'd been reading. It reminds me a bit of like the Ethiopian eunuch, but the other way around. The young man gave his full attention and talked with George about his life.

And George was then able to share his faith in Jesus, the promise of eternal life, explaining the gospel. And the young man was drawn to it and said he might even come to church.

[15:18] Can you see? Be strong and courageous, for the Lord your God is with you. Shall we turn to him now in prayer?

Dear loving Heavenly Father, thank you that you have the power to dispel our fears by the word of your promise and by the power of your presence.

Help us to daily meditate on your word so that we can be strong in you and courageous in the days that we are living in. For the glory of your great name, we pray.

Amen. Amen.