
“Be Strong & Courageous”

Joshua 1:1-18

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November 15, 2020

(Joshua 1:1-18)

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ²“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. ³I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵No one will be able to stand 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. ⁶Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

⁷“Be strong and very courageous. 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. ⁸Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; 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. ⁹Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

¹⁰ So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹ “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your provisions 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.’”

¹² But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, ¹³ “Remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you after he said, ‘The Lord your God will give you rest by giving you this land.’ ¹⁴ Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, ready for battle, must cross over ahead of your fellow Israelites. You are to help them ¹⁵ until the Lord gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land the Lord your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise.”

¹⁶ Then they answered Joshua, “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. ¹⁷ Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses. ¹⁸ Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey it, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!”

We are living in uncertain times. COVID case numbers are on the rise. We are at the brink of another lockdown. Even today, our Sunday attendance numbers have been limited to 50 persons, at least for the next four Sundays. We still don't know how long this will last, and if it goes on really long, what will be the impact on all of life? What difference will the vaccine have, will it be only temporary or permanent? What will it mean for all the students and the quality of education they will receive? What will all of this do to the economy? What about the health of our aging parents and grandparents? We know they are the most vulnerable and here's what I've been thinking: What about the church? What does this mean for how Christians around the world will worship and grow and serve and do evangelism and missions?

It's easy for all these unknowns to flood our minds and lead us to worry, anxiety and even despair. The fact of the matter is that we waste an enormous amount of time worrying about the unknown. For the Christian however, as we've been learning the past weeks, it's senseless, useless, and unproductive to worry about things over which we have no control. We actually spend a lot of time worrying about the wrong things. We forget that worrying doesn't actually accomplish anything. Rather, it keeps us from doing the things we should be doing, as we learned in last week's message. **How should we to be in the midst of these uncertainties? We must be strong and courageous.**

As we know, God's servant, Moses, led God's people, the Israelites, out of Egypt, where they were captives and slaves for many generations. Once Moses had brought them out of Egypt, the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years. That was their punishment for disbelief. But now the 40 years had come to an end and they were ready to enter the Promised Land. Do you know why it was called the Promised Land? Because it was promised by God to Father Abraham, that ancient patriarch. God told Abraham that his descendants would reside in the land the Israelites were on the verge of entering.

Joshua chapter one begins by telling us that Moses was dead. That's also how the book of Deuteronomy ends. In Deuteronomy 34:7 it says, "Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died." They grieved for him for 30 days. Then in Deuteronomy 34:9 it says, **Deut. 34:9** Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So, the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses.

Moses had already named Joshua as his successor. But there's more to Joshua than that. Joshua was Moses's aide since he was a youth. He was like Moses's shadow. Wherever Moses went, there was Joshua—even up the mountain of God; even to the tent of meeting. Joshua was also a mighty and skilled warrior. He was Moses's most trusted general, leading campaigns against the enemies. Joshua, along with Caleb, were two of the twelve who were sent to spy out the land of Canaan. They were the only two who brought back a positive report. While the ten spies were shaking in their boots, already admitting defeat, Joshua and Caleb were the ones who were like, "We can do this man. Moses, just give us the green light and we'll go in and rout those Canaanites."

Now, as an aside, it's very interesting to observe the relationship Moses had with Joshua. I see a strong parallel with Paul and Timothy. In both of these mentor-mentee relationships there are three key things that I observe that I think are the key components to all mentoring and discipleship relationships:

1. Much time spent together.
2. There is a focus on the spiritual life.
3. There is the delegation of tasks.

Think about these two pairs of relationships and we can include Jesus and the twelve disciples as well. In all of these mentor-mentee relationships, they all share these three elements. Mentoring/discipleship can only occur when a lot of time is invested in the relationship. As the old adage says, a lot more is caught than taught. There is also a great focus on the spiritual life, meaning, how we are to relate to God. Joshua is brought along to the mountain of God and the tent of meeting where Moses met with God.

The disciples are taught by Jesus how to pray to God. Paul is constantly teaching Timothy about the spiritual life. Finally, each mentee is given tasks to accomplish. They are being trained to become leaders. Moses tasks Joshua, Paul tasks Timothy and Jesus tasks his disciples.

Parents, keep these three things in mind in your parenting. For all of us, keep these three things in mind in your mentoring and discipleship relationships.

Now, back to Joshua. Moses has died and Joshua's in charge. Moses's job was to lead the people out of Egypt. Now Joshua's job is to lead the people into the Promised Land. He's been mentored for many, many years for this day. But what is it on which he's basing his confidence? More importantly, what is it that on which God wants Joshua to base his confidence? Is it his years of experience as an army general, as a leader? Is it upon his charismatic leadership? Or is it upon being the special appointed successor of the great Moses? No. It's none of those things. Joshua's strength and courage are to be in the promises of God. Listen for the language of promise in these verses:

² "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. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand 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. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

To put our trust in the promises of God is the same as putting our trust in God. A person's promise is only as good as the person who's making the promise. Is the person trustworthy to keep the promise? Yes, he may be a trustworthy person. He doesn't lie. But that may not be enough. We also have to consider his ability. Does he have the power and resources to actually do what he said he will do? Of course, the answer is yes. God is faithful. You see, all of God's promises are rooted in two things. One is his character and the other is his power. Specifically, it's in one particular characteristic upon which we can trust in Him. It's that God is good. God's goodness encompasses his love and mercy and faithfulness to his covenant children.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that God is good? Do you believe that God indeed has the power, the ability, to do what he says he will do? Or will you rely on your experience, your ingenuity, your education, or your steady personality. Joshua had no one to rely on. His mentor, the greatest, most humble, most powerful, and most God-anointed leader was dead. Talk about enormous shoes to fill. Yes, Joshua was talented. Sure, he was trained and experienced. God used those qualities that he had, but ultimately God tells Joshua to trust in Him. And that's the same for us. God alone is good. He alone has the power to deliver you, to rescue you, to show you the right path to take, to be with you in your most difficult seasons, to give you peace and hope. That's how we can be strong and courageous.

That phrase, “Be strong and courageous,” occurs no less than four times in this chapter, but it appears for the first time in Deuteronomy 31:6. The first time these words are spoken, the Israelites are camped outside of Canaan, and Moses gives his final marching orders to the Israelites before he dies and he says to them,

Deu 31:5 The LORD will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded you. ⁶ Be **strong** and **courageous**. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

And then Moses speaks directly to Joshua in front of all the people,

Deu 31:7 “Be **strong** and **courageous**, for you must go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. ⁸ The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

The phrase appears again in verse 23, but this time, it is the LORD himself who speaks to Joshua.

The LORD gave this command to Joshua son of Nun: “Be **strong** and **courageous**, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I myself will be with you.”

So, first Moses speaks to all the people. Then Moses addresses Joshua specifically in front of the people, and then God himself speaks to Joshua. Isn't this the same way it works even today? A preacher gets on the pulpit, like today and says to the people, “Be strong and courageous.” Then he addresses the leaders, like I did yesterday in our leader's meeting. I shared from Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” I told them that as leaders, we must not cower, we must not lead from fear. We must continue to carry out the mission of Christ's church in the power of the Holy Spirit.” And then finally, doesn't God speak to each one of us directly, as we read the Scriptures and as we pray? He might say, “Peter, you have a big challenge coming up. Be strong and courageous.” Or, “You have a serious surgery coming up. Be strong and courageous.” Or, “You're a new parent. Be strong and courageous.” Or, “You're entering the work force. Be strong and courageous.” Or, “COVID cases are on the rise. Be strong and courageous.” Or, “Go and reach the nations with the gospel. Be strong and courageous.” Or, “You're going to share the gospel with a loved one. Be strong and courageous.” Or, “You're going to die. Be strong and courageous.”

What is the common basis for his being strong and courageous? What is the phrase that is included each time when that command is given, back in Deuteronomy and here in Joshua 1? It's this: “I will be with you.” If God is not with us, we wither, we tremble in fear, we flee from our enemies, but, if God is for us, then who can be against us? Remember Paul's words?

(Romans 8:37) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It was Jesus himself who told us after his resurrection, as he was giving us the mission. “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Can there be a greater source of confidence than the presence of Christ in our lives?

Now let me draw your attention to verses 7-9. I think this is the centerpiece of this passage. Verse 7 begins with the words, “Be strong and very courageous.” Then the phrase appears again in verse 9. “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous.” I just love that God says to Joshua, “Have I not commanded you?!”

Now, I don't know about you, but I love watching war movies. WW1, WW2, Vietnam war, Iraq, doesn't matter. I think I've watched every war movie on Netflix. Saving Private Ryan. Unbroken. We Were Soldiers. Black Hawk Down. Full Metal Jacket. Dunkirk. The Hurt Locker. Apocalypse Now. Thin Red Line. Hacksaw Ridge. Enemy at the Gate. Braveheart. Fury. I've seen them all. I love the explosions. I love the blood and guts. But more than anything, I love the heroic stories of sacrifice and courage and victory.

One of the things I've noticed in all of these movies is that the soldiers are never asked by their commanding officers to do something. You never hear them say, “Now men, can I request that you be brave in the conflict you are about to enter?” “Big favor men. I hope you can do it. Would you be courageous?” You'll never see that. Rather, it's always, “Be strong men. Be courageous men. Fight to the death. Take the beach. Secure that building!” In fact, there is no asking in war! Only commands!

The same is true with Joshua. God doesn't say. “Joshua, come here buddy. I got a big favor to ask. I hope you'll say yes. We've got a formidable enemy. Unfamiliar terrain. Do you think you can help me out? Oh, you can? Great. Now, would you mind if you could muster up some strength and courage? Oh, you can? Awesome. I knew I could count on you.” No, it's not like that at all. Rather, God says, “Joshua, be strong and very courageous. Haven't I commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” It's the same for us. God shakes us out of our fear and commands us. Hey, wake up, focus, pay attention. I command you, Be strong and courageous, because I will be with you.

Now I mentioned that verses 7-9 begin and end with the phrase “Be strong and courageous.” Let's look at what's in between? What's in the middle? There are a bunch of commands regarding the word of God.

1. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you.
2. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left.
3. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips
4. Meditate on it day and night

What's the connection? What's the connection between being strong and courageous and the Word of God? **First**, it must mean that obedience to God's Word is more important than the mission. Or that the mission of God can never be divorced from the Word of God. These two things must go hand in hand. What might that look like today? Well, a person might sense some sort of call to serve God in some endeavor, but does it her own way, in the way that she thinks is best. She doesn't consult the Scriptures to see what the mission should be, to discover God's objective. Nor does she bother to find out if the Scriptures tells her how the mission should be done; what should be the methods, what should be the priority and what should be peripheral or secondary. Or, consider the mission parents receive to raise their children. Can you imagine a Christian parent that never consults the word of God to guide them in their parenting? Mom and dad themselves, don't read or meditate upon or obey the word of God, so they have no basis of confidence or authority to tell their children to do the same. They're constantly giving their children unbiblical advice. Or what about a student that's in a hostile, secular university environment. God has given that student a mission, an assignment and he must carry out that mission according to God's word. The mission that God has given to us, whatever that mission is, must always align with what is taught in his Word.

Here's something else these verses must be teaching. Leadership is much more than being skilful. It's more than having leadership gifts or abilities or great communication skills or being a powerful motivator. Maybe in the secular world, that's all we expect from a leader, but not in the Christian world. In the Christian world, a leader's interaction with and commitment to and transformation by the Word of God is absolutely necessary to even be considered a leader. It's a prerequisite of Christian leadership. A Christian is a leader only when he or she is saturated in the Word of God. That's why in the New Testament all elders in the church, both pastor elders and lay elders, are required to be able to teach, and must display in their lives that they love the Word and have been transformed by the Word. In fact, God says to Joshua that the only way he would be prosperous and successful is that He obeys the Word of God.

Finally, this tells us how our success should be measured. Not by how much money we make or how large our home is or how big our retirement fund is or even how big our church is. That is not the measure of success at all. Rather, how conformed is your life to the Word of God? How careful are you with God's Word? How diligent are you to obey it? How prominent of a place does the Word of God have in your own life? That's the real way to measure success and that success is guaranteed.

This is what we saw in our Saviour, who by the way shares the same name with Joshua. Didn't he have the most formidable task before him? He had to take upon his shoulders, the sins of the world. He had to bear upon his life, the terrible wrath of God. Jesus agonized in the Garden, pleading with God to take away the cup of suffering, but always praying, "not my will, but yours be done." Jesus was the one, who was always careful to obey the law. Not once did he turn from it, to the right or to the left. And by doing so, he became the most prosperous, the most successful person ever. Why did he do that? He did it for God, to obey him, to glorify him. But he also did it for us, to do for us what we couldn't do for ourselves and so, he calls upon all of us to trust in Him and through Him and through the promises and the Word he has given, we too can be strong and courageous.

Let me close with this story. *My mother passed away when I was 28 years old from a long and arduous battle with breast cancer. After all the dust had settled after the funeral, I came across her Bible. It was your typical Korean Bible. Big. Black. It had the Korean translation, the English translation, and of course, the complete Korean hymnal. It wouldn't be a Korean Bible without the hymnal. Of course, a zipper along the end to enclose it all. When I got my hands on her Bible, I saw that it was fairly new. It wasn't the old Bible she had used for many, many years, weathered and marked up. This Bible was relatively new. So I opened it up and started flipping through the pages and her bookmark, that red ribbon, was placed at this very chapter, right there at Joshua chapter 1. And verse 7, the words, "Be strong and very courageous" were underlined, very shakily. Now as I looked more closely at the page, I noticed an imperfection. It was a circular wrinkle mark about a centimeter wide. It looked like a single drop of water fell on that page. I can't be certain, but I think it was her tear. Why else would there be a water wrinkle right there and only there on that page, on her new Bible? So, I thought, "I wonder if this was the verse that she needed most during the months leading up to her death. I wonder if her pastor visited her and shared a devotion with her from this text. I wonder if she sensed the presence of God being with her, during the final weeks?" I can't be certain. I'll have to ask her when I get to heaven.*

It shows me that these are powerful words in the face of great difficulty and when we face a great adversary. We mustn't retreat in fear. We mustn't stop taking risks. We can't stop carrying out the mission of God. We can be confident and face our trials and hardships, even through our tears, because of God and especially because of what Christ has done for us, because of his presence with us, because of his powerful Word. So, people of God, Be strong and very courageous.

Let's pray.