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Joshua #2

Sermon Summary #2

Be Strong and Courageous! Joshua 1:1-9

I can well imagine how excited Moses must have been as he watched the tens of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children make their way out of Egypt, out of slavery, out of bondage, in what we know and refer to as the **Exodus**. For 400 years the nation of Israel had lived in subjection to their Egyptian overlords. But now the time had come for freedom!

It takes one's breath away to think of the marvelous miracles and displays of divine power that they witnessed as God intervened to secure their freedom. The 10 plagues of judgment that fell upon Egypt should have been enough to strengthen their faith and secure their obedience to God. But on top of that they witnessed the pillar of cloud separating and protecting them from the onrushing chariots of Egypt. As if that were not enough, they beheld the parting of the waters of the Red Sea, as God led them through on dry ground only then to swallow up and drown the armies of Pharaoh.

And then of course there was the incident in the wilderness where God turned bitter waters into sweet, refreshing, drinkable water so that his people might survive. There's still more, as God then provided them with food, by sending down manna from heaven. Once again, as the people grew thirsty, God instructed Moses to strike a rock with his staff and water miraculously flowed from it to sustain the people in the desert.

The miracles and displays of power continue, as God enables Israel to defeat the Amalekites in response to the intercessory prayers of Moses. When the nation finally arrives at the foot of Mt. Sinai, we read in Exodus 19:16 that "there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled." The people saw the entire mountain enveloped in smoke and fire as the glory of the Lord descended upon it. They literally felt the mountain tremble and shake from the Lord's presence there.

When Moses departed from the presence of the Lord and descended the mountain to rejoin the people, we are told in Exodus 34 that his face shined with the glory of the Lord, so brightly and radiantly that the people were terrified to come near him.

And these are but a random sampling of all the incredible displays of supernatural and miraculous power witnessed and experienced by the people of Israel. I could spend another hour describing numerous other remarkable events, all of which should have served to deepen their faith in God.

When the people finally arrived at the edges of the promised land, Moses sent 12 men, one from each of the 12 tribes, to spy out the land to determine how large and strong were the nations that occupied it. When the men returned, 10 of them were terrified and insisted that there was no way possible for Israel to defeat the Canaanites. The people became alarmed and "grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? . . . Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt? And they said to one another, 'Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt'" (Numbers 14:2-4).

God's reaction was swift and decisive. None of the people "who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, [none of them] shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it" (Num. 14:22-23).

What followed next was devastating beyond words. Instead of granting them entrance into the land, God forced his people to wander an additional 38½ years in the wilderness. During this time, every person over the age of 20 would

die. The only two exceptions were **Joshua and Caleb**, the two spies among the twelve who were convinced that Israel would have no problem defeating the Canaanites.

When the final 38½ of the 40 years of wandering were completed, Moses died. The year is 1406 b.c.

I've rehearsed this story for two reasons. First, I wanted once again to set Joshua and this book in its proper historical framework, much as I attempted to do last week. But second, I also want you to think about how this 40 years of wandering affected Joshua and his perspective as leader of Israel. Here is what I mean.

Best estimates are that there were some 1,200,000 people in Israel over the age of 20 at the beginning of this wilderness wandering (@ 600,000 men or "warriors" alone). There were just over 14,000 days during which all of them eventually died because of God's judgment. That averages out at a little more than 85 per day. If you allow 12 hours a day maximum for funerals, there would have been **7 funerals every hour, every day (including the Sabbath), for 38½ years!**

Let that sink in for a moment. I can assure you that it sank deeply into the soul of Joshua, as he had to watch it happen. *The memory of death after death after death and the anguish that he felt over Israel's disobedience undoubtedly intensified his determination to obey God's commands.* Perhaps never before had any single individual personally witnessed such a startling illustration of the magnitude of God's holiness and the depth of man's depravity.

It would certainly make sense to me if Joshua had felt overwhelmed at the prospect of taking over the reins of leadership from Moses. I could understand if he hesitated, balked, or maybe even asked that God find someone else more worthy of the task. Needless to say, it forces me to ask the question: How did he do it? What sustained Joshua to faithfully carry out such an awesomely overwhelming task of leading the people of Israel into Canaan? For the answer, you need look no farther than here in Joshua 1:1-9. **Three truths** were to be the **foundation** on which Joshua proceeded, and today we will look at each of them:

The certainty of God's promise
One's confidence in God's presence
The centrality of God's principles

(1) The Certainty of God's Promise (vv. 1-5a)

The land itself is described in v. 4 - "the wilderness" or "the desert" refers to the south; "this Lebanon" points to the northern border; "the great river, the river Euphrates" points to the east; and "the Great Sea" refers to the Mediterranean in the west.

We must never lose site of the *sheer physical difficulty* of crossing the Jordan River. They had no boats, no bridges, no airlift! And let's not forget that according to Joshua 3:15 the river was at flood stage!

But it wasn't the physical dimensions of the Jordan that posed the greatest threat. Two things threatened to undermine Joshua's assurance of the certainty of God's promise:

First, there was the memory of Moses and his exploits. Joshua had to fight against the fear of being overshadowed by Moses' acknowledged greatness. Feelings of inadequacy, even inferiority, must be resisted. After all, the people had just spent 30 days mourning the death of Moses (Deut. 34:8). "Who am I," Joshua must have often asked himself? "Who am I that I should be expected to lead the people into the land?"

Second, the people of Israel themselves posed a massive threat to success. They had a long history of rebellion, a track record of unbelief and grumbling. They had even threatened at one point to kill Moses if he didn't take them back to Egypt! Joshua had seen it all, and it must have weighed heavily on his heart.

The key to Joshua's determination was also two-fold:

Faith – He banked everything on God’s word. The Lord reminded Joshua of this promise in v. 2b and again in v. 3. *Joshua’s future depended entirely on God’s past promise*. So does yours and mine! Will he or won’t he do what he has promised to do? Will we or won’t we believe him?

Obedience – As will become evident, Joshua determined to take the steps God had commanded. “The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand” (Ps. 37:23-24). Joshua believed that as long as he walked where God would lead him, he would succeed in the task assigned to him.

One question begs to be answered. If God had already promised the land by covenant to Abraham and his seed, if God had already given the land to Israel, what need is there for Joshua to be strong and courageous? What difference would it make if Joshua turned out to be weak and cowardly?

Here we see the *beautiful interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility*. God’s decree and promise and purpose and the certainty that his will shall come to pass in no way negate the absolute necessity that we obey his command. Why? Because it is our obedience, through the strength God supplies, that God employs as the means to fulfill his promise.

I’m a Calvinist. When people hear that they think it means God will do whatever God will do *irrespective* of what we will or will not do. No! God will do what he has decreed and promised to do *through* or *by means of* our obedience to his commands. Joshua didn’t appeal to God’s sovereignty as an excuse for neglecting his commands. Rather, the certainty of God’s purpose is precisely the *incentive* that stirred Joshua’s heart to *obey* God’s commands.

(2) One’s Confidence in God’s Presence (vv. 5b, 9b)

“Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you” (v. 5b). “For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (v. 9b). Were ever more encouraging words spoken by God to a human being? Let’s look at how God had earlier said it to Moses in **Deuteronomy 31:1-8**.

I’m sure Joshua and Moses had spoken often of the paralyzing force of fear and hesitation. And I’m sure Moses would have reminded Joshua each time of what God had said (see Exod. 3:12). And now this *same God* reassures Joshua with the *same promise*.

When God commanded Moses and the people to leave Sinai and move into the wilderness on the way to Canaan, he said: “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Exod. 33:14). Moses responded by saying: “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here” (33:15).

Moses had seen more miracles and powerful displays of God’s supernatural power than any man in history. Yet he said: “Lord, beyond miracles and power, I want you. Without you, I won’t go. No God, no go!”

But if God is *omnipresent*, what can it possibly mean to speak of his “presence” going or abiding with his people (whether with Moses, Joshua, or the nation as a whole)?

Consider the difference between God’s *omni-presence* and his *manifest presence* . . .

To experience God’s continual and abiding “presence” means, among other things:

- The unshakable and liberating knowledge that we belong to him and nothing will ever separate us from his love.
- The reassuring promise that we are the recipients of his saving favor and grace, not based on what we’ve done but solely based on what he does.
- The experiential joy of feeling his nearness and knowing that no matter how dark it may become, no matter how perilous the circumstances may be, no matter how powerful is the opposition we face, God is at our side (Ps. 23).

- The gracious guarantee that nothing will come our way that God can't providentially turn for our ultimate good and his glory.
- The absolute assurance that whatever he requires us to do he will more than abundantly supply the strength and power to obey.

To sum it up in the words of our *Bridgeway Bookmark* . . . !

In the case of Joshua, it wasn't long before God was living up to his word – See Joshua 3:7; 6:27.

What are the practical implications for us today of God's promise to Joshua 3,500 years ago that he would always be present with him, that he would never leave or forsake him? How do we know that this truth of God's abiding presence is relevant for us now? The answer is found in two crucial NT texts.

The first is, of course, the so-called Great Commission in **Matthew 28:18-20** with our Lord's promise to his disciples both in the first century and throughout church history that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, . . . and behold, *I am with you always*, to the end of the age." There is an unmistakable parallel between the commissioning of Joshua to enter the promised land and the commissioning of Christ's disciples (and us) to enter the whole earth. As Moses' departure left Joshua in charge of Israel, the ascension of Jesus left the church in the hands of the apostles. As Joshua's commission launched Israel's crossing into Canaan, Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28 launched the exodus of the church from Canaan "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The second passage is **Hebrews 13:5-6** where the author of that book quotes Joshua 1 and applies it to our experience.

What is so remarkable about this passage is that the author appeals to God's abiding presence with us as the grounds for overcoming greed and the temptation to materialism! If you want to be free from the love of money, meditate upon the truth that the God of heaven and earth, the God who delivered his people from Egypt, the God who entered our world in the person of Jesus and suffered and rose again for our sins, this very God "will never leave" us or ever "forsake" us!

If God will never leave me or forsake me, I don't need to crave money or depend upon it as the source of my security and happiness. God assures me that he will be there for me and will meet every need. The promise isn't wealth. The antidote to greed isn't the assurance that God will give me earthly riches. *The antidote to greed is the promise of his presence!*

The glorious conclusion the author draws from this is found in v. 6 – "So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"

His point is that if God is always there for me, and I'm satisfied with his presence and all that he is for me in Jesus, no human being can control or shape my destiny or ultimately do anything to rob me of the joy I need to flourish. People may persecute me, slander me, abandon me, even kill me. But they can't do anything that jeopardizes or undermines my forgiveness and acceptance with God.

Thus we see how immensely practical this is. Addiction to money and what it can obtain for me is broken by the power of truth. The truth is that God is here and will never leave me. To the extent that I fail to believe and trust in the truth of God's presence, I will live in anxiety and fear. And it is anxiety and fear that will lead me into sinful paths and practices which promise to bring the peace and security my heart craves.

(3) The Centrality of God's Principles (vv. 7-8)

Joshua's success hung suspended on this:

First, he must *obey* the law. All the study and memorization in the world will count for nothing if you don't **do** what God says.

Second, note also that he must obey **“all”** the law (no picking and choosing; selective obedience is not permitted).

A man once asked John Wimber, “Where are we going with all this stuff? What is our church doing? What are we becoming?” Wimber held up his Bible and said: “We’re not going anywhere this book doesn’t take us.” The man replied, seemingly relieved: “Whew! Good! That’s a relief and a load off my mind.” After the man left, Wimber said: “Does he have *any* idea of what’s actually *in* this book?”

Often people affirm their belief in the Bible and commit to obey it without much knowledge of what it actually says. Once they discover its content they become inconsistently selective in their obedience. They obey what they like, what they’re used to, what reinforces their tradition, what makes them feel safe and comfortable, what won’t embarrass them, whatever lets them keep control, etc.

Third, he must **not “deviate”** to the right or to the left. The path of God’s word is straight and unmistakable and no compromise is allowed.

Finally, he must **“meditate”** on it day and night.

The idea of meditation here is **not quiet reflection, but vocal declaration**. Note that the law must not “depart from your **mouth**”, not your heart or your mind, but your “mouth.” In all likelihood, God is referring to soft oral recitation of the law, a quiet reading that is nonetheless so intense that it produces audible whispering. Don’t just think it, speak it!

The psalmist declares that the way not to sin, i.e., the way to enjoy God above all else, is by treasuring his Word in our hearts (Ps. 119:11). Making God’s Word our heart’s treasure is another way of describing one aspect of meditation. “Treasuring” it “in our hearts” means placing ultimate value on its truth, prizing it as something precious and dear and of supreme excellence, and then ingesting it through memorization and meditation so that it flows freely through our spiritual veins. When this happens the Holy Spirit energizes our hearts to believe and behave in conformity with its dictates. In other words, we sin less.

Meditation begins, but by no means ends, with *thinking* on Scripture. To meditate properly our souls must reflect upon what our minds have ingested and our hearts must rejoice in what our souls have grasped. We have truly meditated when we slowly read, prayerfully imbibe, humbly rely upon, and verbally declare what God has revealed to us in his Word. All of this, of course, in conscious dependence on the internal, energizing work of the Spirit.

Meditation, then, is being attentive to God. It is one way we “keep seeking the things above where Christ is” (Col. 3:1). It is a conscious, continuous engagement of the mind with God. This renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:1-2) is part of the process by which the word of God penetrates the soul and spirit with the light of illumination and the power of transformation.

Meditation may take any one of several forms, depending on the object upon which we focus our mental and spiritual energy.

Meditation on Scripture

Consider these texts, all of which are similar in force to Joshua 1:8.

"How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:1-2).

"Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee" (Ps. 119:11).

"I will meditate on Thy precepts, and regard Thy ways" (Ps. 119:15).

"Even though princes sit and talk against me, Thy servant meditates on Thy statutes" (Ps. 119:23).

"And I shall lift up my hands to Thy commandments, which I love; and I will meditate on Thy statutes" (Ps. 119:48).

"May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie; but I shall meditate on Thy precepts" (Ps. 119:78).

"O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97).

"I have more insight than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation" (Ps. 119:99).

"How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103).

"My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Thy word" (Ps. 119:148).

Boring? Tedious? Hardly! When the seed of the Word sprouts and sinks its roots deeply into our souls, the fruit it yields is sheer gladness. The psalmist declares him "blessed" who "greatly delights" in God's commandments (Ps. 112:1). In the celebration of God's Word in Psalm 119, we read of him finding more joy in God's testimonies than in all riches and what they might buy (Ps. 119:14). He committed himself to "delight" in God's statutes (Ps. 119:16,24,35,47,70,77) and to relish the joy they bring even in the midst of affliction (Ps. 119:92,143).

Meditation on God and His Works

"One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple" (Ps. 27:4).

"When I remember Thee on my bed, I meditate on Thee in the night watches" (Ps. 63:6).

"I have considered the days of old, the years of long ago. I will remember my song in the night; I will meditate with my heart; and my spirit ponders. . . . I shall remember the deeds of the Lord; surely I will remember Thy wonders of old. I will meditate on all Thy work, and muse on Thy deeds" (Ps. 77:5-6,11-12).

"Great are the works of the Lord; they are studied by all who delight in them" (Ps. 111:2).

"Make me understand the way of Thy precepts, so I will meditate on Thy wonders" (Ps. 119:27).

"I will remember the days of old; I meditate on all Thy doings; I muse on the work of Thy hands" (Ps. 143:5).

"On the glorious splendor of Thy majesty, and on Thy wonderful works, I will meditate" (Ps. 145:5).

"If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (Col. 3:1-2).

"Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith . . . for consider Him . . ." (Heb. 12:2-3).

Other texts on Meditation

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer" (Ps. 19:14).

"Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; as for me, I shall be glad in the Lord" (Ps. 104:34).

"Cease striving and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10).

"My mouth will speak wisdom; and the meditation of my heart will be understanding" (Ps. 49:3).

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

Clearly biblical meditation does not entail the emptying of one's mind but filling it with God and his revealed truths. The believer isn't passive in meditation but actively and energetically focused on God. If the believer disengages from the distractions and allurements of the world, it is in order that he/she might engage or attach with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Unlike eastern meditation, which advocates an inner journey to find the center of one's being, Christian meditation calls for an outward focus on the objective revelation of God in Scripture and creation.

Finally, the promise of "prosperity" in v. 8, contrary to what many have thought, is *not* financial wealth. The two words used here, to "prosper" and "succeed" almost never in the OT speak of financial success. They refer to succeeding in the many endeavors and tasks that life poses. The word "to prosper" occurs 69x in OT and 59 of them mean to succeed in one's endeavors. The word "to succeed" occurs 78x, typical of which are 1 Kings 2:3 and 2 Kings 18:5-6,7.

In closing, we shouldn't overlook the three times that God exhorts Joshua: "***Be strong and courageous***" (vv. 6, 7, 9). What exactly does he mean by this?

Courage is the determination to obey God irrespective of the cost or consequences. Courage is that state of mind and heart which loves God more than it fears men. Courage is what Pastor Yousef is displaying in that Iranian prison. Courage is what Martin Luther displayed at the Diet of Worms in 1521 when he stood up to the Emperor and Pope, declaring: "My conscience is bound to the Word of God. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me." Courage is seizing the opportunity to explain the gospel to a co-worker or neighbor or friend knowing that it may well cost you business opportunities and perhaps even your reputation.

Conclusion: Where do you need the most help today? What is it that you feel is hindering courage and paralyzing obedience? Consider the three major points of this passage:

Do you doubt the validity of God's promises? Do you question his reliability? Do you wonder if he is ever going to come through in the way he said he would?

Have you lost any sense of God's presence? Do you fear he may have abandoned you? Does he seem remote and indifferent to your needs? Are you afraid of facing life alone and without him?

Can you honestly say that the principles and truths of God's Word are functioning as the guiding force in your life? Have you grown cold to Scripture? Do you meditate on its truths?

If we are ever to experience the strength and courage that God requires, we must first avail ourselves and immerse our souls in these three foundational realities: Trust God's promises for you! Abide in God's presence with you! Meditate on God's Word in you!