

"Wise Words for Spiritual Warfare"

It is not unusual for commanding generals to give words of encouragement to soldiers going into battle. Friday, June 7th was the 75th anniversary of D.Day, the invasion of Normandy - a fierce battle of enormous significance in World War II. General Dwight Eisenhower delivered a speech to the soldiers on the eve of the invasion. He said the eyes of the world were on them. He said they were fighting to bring about the elimination of Nazi tyranny over oppressed people. He said:

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped, and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

He talked about previous victories and said this:

... I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty, and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full victory. ¹

I was thinking this week that what we have in **Joshua 1** is God's pre-invasion speech to Joshua, the commander of his army just before going into the Promised Land

Of course, we are not facing the physical danger of a D'Day. Those guys were heroes, and many gave their lives. And yet the Bible was written in a day when physical brutality of warfare was well known and yet it some of the most vivid and common metaphors in Scripture are those that relate the struggles of daily life to the drama savage warfare.

There are at least two reasons for this. 1st.) We need the dramatic imagery of battle to wake us up to the more subtle but very real spiritual dangers we face. There are real casualties and many opportunities for heroism or cowardice every day. 2nd.) We need the imagery of battle to show us the kind of warriors we need to be. We need to know this, and we need to hear the wise words that we are given by our commander. The same Bible that describes us as sheep in need of a Shepherd says we are warriors facing a savage enemy. With what words will our commander send us into our conflicts? That's what this passage from Joshua is also about. These are the key verses of the whole book of Joshua. In this passage, ***God teaches us that spiritual warriors need a special kind of strength. We need***

the courageous strength of obedient faith. God tells Joshua there are three related things he needs for the battle he's about to face. Those three things turn out to be what we *all* need, no matter what our battles. 1. We need *obedience, confidence and courage.*

First, we need obedience. **Verses 7 & 8** *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.* This is early in the history of the Bible but notice that already what is guiding the people is not just passed down stories, or direct guidance, but a book. He says obey the book.

I. OBEY THE BOOK YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN BY GOD.

The word "law" is thought of in very narrow ways by many Christians, but the Hebrew word *Torah* isn't just law in the sense of rules but teaching, guidance, and instruction. In the first chapter of the book of Proverbs, this is the word used when it says, *Listen my son to your Father's instruction and forsake not your mother's teaching.* ²God's instruction and guidance is found in a book.

He says...

A. God's book needs to be in your mouth.

Jesus said it is out of the abundance or fullness of the heart that the mouth speaks.³ The wisdom and instruction of God's book is so treasured in our hearts that it is coloring, shaping our speech.

The second emphasis underscores the first.

B. You shall meditate on it day and night.

To meditate is to reflect on it. You think about what it implies and what it suggests and what it reveals about God and what it requires of you.

Now, why do you do all of that? He says,

C. Be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

He says, *"be careful, don't turn to the right or the left – don't deviate in any direction."* He says do *all* that is written. It's that important. It isn't about obey God to earn your salvation it is about the necessity of obedience to fulfill your mission.

The president of TriStar pictures has said that she is interested in doing a film based on *The Silver Chair*, one of the books in the Narnia series by C.S. Lewis. She said that the key character in the story, Jill, is a girl who has been bullied and has to find the courage to stand up for herself and that is such strong and needed message for today. ⁴ There is an element of that in the story. But what C.S. Lewis is really stressing in the story is a message about obedience to God. At the beginning of the story Aslan, the lion who is a Christ figure gives Jill and her friend Eustace a mission to find a lost prince and four signs to guide them in their mission. He says remember the signs. Say them to yourself when you wake in the morning and when you lie down at night and when wake in the middle of the night. Up here on the mountain, the air is clear, and your mind is clear, but as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind. He says, *"Remember the signs and believe the signs daughter of Eve, nothing else matters."*

At one point they come across a strange Knight. He is tied to a silver chair. They've been told that he is a dangerous, savage psychotic and that no matter what he says they must not let him go or he will destroy them. They promise each other that no matter what they will not untie him. The knight is seems dangerous and desperate. He begs them to untie him, and then he says, "I charge you to free me, by the great lion, by Aslan himself." And you see, here's the thing, that was the fourth sign Aslan had given Jill. He had said, *"You will know the prince by this, he will be the first person you meet in your travels who asks you to do something in my name."*

So there is Jill, her friend Eustach and another friend who is simple but solid with the strange named Puddlegum. And Jill says, *"Oh, what are we to do?"* What was the use of promising each other not to let him go if they cave in just because he used Aslan's name? Jill, says *If only we knew what to do.* Puddlegum says, *"I think we do know."* Eustach says, *"Do you mean everything will be all right if we just untie him."*

Puddlegum says, *"I don't know about that. Aslan didn't tell Jill what would happen. He just told her what to do." That fellow will be the death of us once he's up, I shouldn't wonder. But that doesn't let us off following the sign."* So Lewis says with bright eyes they said good-bye to each other, shook hands and then cut him loose. He was immediately released from his enchantment. He was the lost prince restored, and they had fulfilled their mission. What a powerful image of obedience for children of God and for the battles of life. Do we ever

find ourselves in a situation in which we ask what should we do even though God has given us a book that tells us what to do?

The first crucial need is obedience. The second is confidence.

II. BELIEVE IN THE VICTORY YOU ARE PROMISED BY GOD.

Verse 8 says, *then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*

A. The victory God promises is defined by the mission he gives.

This is not God saying if you do what I ask you to do for me then I will do whatever you ask me to do for you. It is God saying, you commit to fulfill my calling in your life, and I will see that you succeed in fulfilling my calling in your life. The stories of the great believers in the Bible show us that sometimes what may be successful in God's eyes may look like something other than prospering in the world eyes. Does that rob the promise of its power? Not in the least.

B. The greatest victory we are promised comes in eternity.

Romans 8:37 says, *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* To be more than conquerors means you win big. But if you go back and look at **Romans 8**, you will see that this promised victory requires an eternal perspective. It is in the same chapter that he says, **verse 18**, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* The promised victory is that you will be so richly rewarded by God in eternity that you will not even be able to compare the suffering of the present with the glory to come.

C. To believe in your ultimate victory matters in your life choices.

Maybe some of you will scoff at that idea or the impact of future victory in heavenly glory but that is what Jesus clearly taught, and he believed in its tremendous relevance for life.

Listen to the beatitudes from **Luke 6:21-22**

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

Why does Jesus point us to our future rewards?

Because if you knew what he knows you would realize there is no greater cause for joy and courage in the present than the future we will inherit. He's not saying this is your only motivation, but he is saying this is an underlying promise. In the end, you will win.

I remember a pastor whose sixteen-year-old daughter had to have her leg amputated because of a malignant tumor. He says he realized that there were only two choices. One was to hold on to his anger, the other was to choose to believe and to trust God. Those were the only two alternatives. Faith or unbelief. He writes;

I said to God... I don't know how all of this fits together. I don't understand the reasons for it. I'm not even going to ask for the explanation. I've chosen to accept the fact that you are God, and I'm the servant instead of the other way around.....

It was in that choice that I came to cope with my situation. I have come to realize that God has a higher purpose. I'm prepared to wait until eternity to receive the answers to my questions... I trust in Him.

Joshua was promised victory in his battle to possess the Promised Land. In the New Testament the Promised Land becomes a symbol of the fulness of the new and eternal life Jesus promised those who trust in him. In the New Testament Paul says we don't fight flesh and blood and the weapons of our warfare are not physical. It's about living and sharing the gospel. But the promise of victory applies to us in our battles also. So fight your spiritual battles with confidence in God.

Obedience: Obey the book you have been given by God

Confidence: Believe in the victory you have been promised by God.

The last keyword is courage.

III. TAKE COURAGE BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

This passage begins and ends with a compelling call to courage. It was already stated in **verse 6**. Here it gets repeated and underscored. Look at it. In **verse 7**, he says, *Only be strong and very courageous.* "Only" is a way of saying whatever else you do make sure that you do this. Be strong and very courageous. *Very!* Not just a little bit. Not hedging your bets. All in, full strength. Place the weight of your whole life and your deepest hopes on the reality of God's presence and his promises. He's clear, but he's not done. Look at

verse 9 *Have I not commanded you?* This call to courage is not an optional ideal for the brave-hearted amongst us. It is the command under which our King places us. He adds the negative to the positive in the end. *Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed.*

A. How can these things be commanded?

1. First when the Bible says do not be afraid or dismayed is doesn't mean you must not experience these things at all, but you must not let them be the ruling factors in your heart.

2. Second, when the Bible tells you to be courageous instead of fearful, it gives you something to believe. You counteract the downward pull of fear by a very definite, deliberate act of faith. You believe in the presence of God and the promise of his ultimate victory and choose courage.

Alexander Maclaren said,

B. When strength is a duty weakness is a sin.

In the famous play by Shakespeare, Henry the V. there is a speech where King Henry in the midst of a terrible battle calls on his soldiers to go once more into a breach in the wall. He says,

In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility:
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger;
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,
... Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit⁵

Shakespeare can picture this scene but it has often happened. A king can call on his people to summon up their courage and they do it! Can our king not ask us, both men and women to bend our spirits up with courage? We have the greatest of all reasons for obedience, confidence, and courage. He says, *Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD, your God is with you wherever you go.*"

I've had men and women tell me that **Joshua 1:9** has been a favorite memory verse for them. Whenever facing something that might seem hard or fearful, they have taken this verse and preached to

themselves. Maybe for some of you that would be a very practical helpful takeaway from this message because you need courage.

Some people think the Christian faith only stresses the gentler virtues, like love and kindness. Some think it has even lessened the importance of other virtues like courage and strength. The truth is Christianity elevated love and kindness but did so *without* decreasing the importance of strength and courage. **1 Corinthians 16:13-14** *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. ¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love.* All spiritual progress in a fallen world comes with some element of conflict. Strength and courage are as indispensable today and for everyone, man or woman as they ever were for anyone.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the great example of this. Jesus could not do his gracious work of redemption for us with the heroic side of his human character. He is the Lion and the Lamb. He went to the cross for you. He had to because you and me – we have not been obedient, or believing or courageous. So he was all of that for us, and he gave himself to pay for our sins. He rose again to give us new life.

If you trust him as your Savior, you have the most potent motive ever to obey him as your Lord. He's proven his love. If you trust him as your Savior, you have the greatest reason ever to believe in the victory he has promised you. You see it pictured in his resurrection and you hear it proclaimed all through Scripture. So, you have the greatest reason ever for strength and courage in Him. ***Spiritual warriors need a special kind of strength. We need the courageous strength of obedient faith.***

Amen

Prayer of Response

Lord, Thank you for the heroic courage of Jesus who gave himself to pay the penalty for our sins. Thank you for the victorious resurrection that secures the ultimate victory of all who trust in you. Forgive us when we cower in unbelief because our battle seems too much. Nothing is too much for you. May your presence stiffen our spiritual backbones so that we live as bold and joyful disciples of Jesus knowing the courageous strength of obedient faith. Amen.

¹ <https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/?dod-date=606>

² Proverbs 1:8

³ Luke 6:45

⁴ <https://www.narniaweb.com/2017/06/the-silver-chair-is-about-a-bullied-girl-says-tristar-president/>

⁵ Henry V, Act III Scene 1 (<https://poets.org/poem/henry-v-act-iii-scene-i-once-more-unto-breach-dear-friends>)