

The Location of Strong & Courageous
Courageous Series Week 7
Joshua 6
October 9, 2016

Welcome/intro/vision

This is the last week in our Courageous Series—next week we'll be doing our Chatham Serves Sunday—a great day of serving our community

This was in place before I got here 4 years ago and it's one of the things that I've loved about this church because it shows that we're not just TALKING about loving our neighbor, we're actually committed to doing it! So come join us at 8:30 next Sunday

Today we're closing out our Courageous series and if you're new
we're looking at a character in the Bible who was told by God to be strong and courageous amidst a huge transition and as he takes the lead of a nation of people facing all sorts of challenges

And then he is! At every turn, Joshua faces all kinds of obstacles and challenges
And he chooses a strong and courageous life over and over and over again

And so we're looking at his story and talking about how WE might live lives of every-day courage, too

Because as we've said throughout this series we feel most alive and are our best selves when we're living courageously
and we believe that's because living courageously is more in line with how God made us to live!

And along with that we're also on the verge of a big transition as a church--

at some point later this fall we're going to start our new Pittsboro service and we're going to invite a bunch of folks to be strong and courageous to help start that service
and those of us who are staying here will need to be strong and courageous as we bless those folks to go and start something new

Our mission as a church is to love all of Chatham County with the bold love of Jesus, which is going to require us to be strong and courageous at every turn.

Today, Joshua is going to enter into his very first real battle for the Promised Land that God was giving to them

And God's going to give them a battle plan that isn't going to make any sense whatsoever

The battle plan that God's going to give them is going to run counter to any conventional wisdom

it's going to run counter to Joshua's military training and instincts and what he would naturally do

And in that moment, Joshua's going to have a choice to make and it's the same choice that you and I are going to have to make if we're going to take this whole God thing seriously

What do we do when we get commands from God or nudges from God or directions from God that don't make sense to us?

What do we do when we read something in the Scriptures that runs counter our own instincts or the conventional wisdom?

What do we do when he seems to have shut all the other doors or avenues and the only way forward isn't the way we would have ever chosen for ourselves?

This is mission-critical because what we do in that moment when God's plans run counter our instincts just might dictate whether we ever make it to the place of becoming men and women who are truly strong and courageous

If you've got a Bible, turn with me to Joshua 6, if not on the screen behind me:

Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

Okay, so remember where we are and what's happening: the nation of Israel was a slave nation in Egypt for 400 years, God delivered them out of Egypt with Moses as their leader

Now after 40 years in transit from Egypt, they've arrived at the land God has promised them and they're approaching their first battle to take the land.

The people of Jericho have heard about what God's done for the Israelites, so they're hunkered in and ready for a battle.

²Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in."

In my small group this past week we were talking about the old t.v. show The Office—anyone here ever watch that show?

It highlighted the most ridiculous aspects of life in the corporate world in a way that was sometimes a little too real!

One of the favorite things that they did was that every so often a ridiculous edict would come down from on high that was so random and ridiculous it was, of course, laughable: “What were they thinking!?!?!?!?”

For some of you, that’s a weekly occurrence in your office place!

Here, Joshua might be tempted to ask the Lord if this was a battle plan that should have never made it out of the military intelligence department!

Let’s call this the ring-around-the-rosie battle plan! The ring-around-the-rosie battle plan given to Joshua from God was to have the whole army along with the ark of the covenant and the priests to walk around the city once a day for six days

Now the city wasn’t that big, probably somewhere between 6-9 acres.

So this was a nice little work-out for the Israelite army with full battle gear, but this seems to be a rather odd way to set the groundwork for a military battle

And then God says, “On the 7th day, everyone walk around 7 times, and then give a shout! And ashes, ashes, the walls fall down!”

Now you don’t need to be too much of a contrarian to ask an obvious question: why in the world are we doing it this way?

Why would God give them directions to do a battle this way?

And the way that God seems to answer this over and over and over again is so that all people might know that the victory comes from the Lord.

To which the response of the cynic might be: why does God need that?

Why does God need to be the one who gets the glory, why does God need to be the one who’s at the center of this? Why does it have to be all about God?

Is this just an insecure deity trying to make sure that all his little minions respect him?

This is a fair question and I think the fair response is: he doesn’t need it. God doesn’t need anything.

God is God, he’s not an insecure middle-schooler who wants to make sure that everyone around knows how strong he is!

Do you know who needs to know that this battle and every battle ahead belongs to the Lord? The Israelites do. The Israelites need to know that God is God and that he gives the victories God already knows it. The Israelites will be tempted to forget it.

And so God hands Joshua a battle plan that if they'll follow it, it will propel them into their future as they have more battles ahead and then they move into the establishing of a nation.

And the only problem with that is Joshua has already proven himself in battle, has already demonstrated his abilities on the battle field

And this battle plan goes completely against his instincts as a military man and against all conventional wisdom as to how you might win a battle against a walled and gated city

And so Joshua in this moment faces the same dilemma you and I face that we talked about at the beginning:

what do we do when God's commands go against our instincts? What do we do when God's commands seem counter-intuitive or against the conventional wisdom?

Just read the Bible for any length of time and you'll stumble across something that even if you kind of agree with it in theory, it runs against what you'd most naturally do.

For example: which comes more naturally, seeking *revenge* when someone has wronged you or extending *forgiveness* when someone has wronged you?

And yet which of those two are we commanded to do over and over again in the Scriptures?

Is it more natural to love people who are just like us or is it more natural to love our enemies? And yet what does the Scripture call us to do over and over again?

All throughout the Scriptures there's stuff that messes with us:

there are commands about money, commands about sexuality, commands about NOT coveting no matter what you see on your Facebook newsfeed!

There are commands about how we're to cut across dividing lines like race and class and culture that are so deeply entrenched in our world

commands to fight for justice and fight for the oppressed and the marginalized

There are all sorts of commands throughout the Scripture that lay out a Path for us that just like this plan handed to Joshua might not quite sit right with us initially

or that require something of us that we're not sure we want to give ourselves to, it might not be what the rest of the world is doing

And the question is, what will we do in that moment? Now, much of the time this question isn't quite that clear

Most of the time there's the thing that we WANT to do

and there's the quiet little voice inside our heads that tells us that God's way is in a different direction and we just pretend not to hear that voice and press ahead with what WE want to do

But for all of us who have followed Jesus for any length of time, there come points in our journey where the road forks VERY clearly and we have to make a decision:

are we going to follow our own instincts or what everyone around us is doing, or are we going to follow God's path?

And it's likely that for all of us our track record of the decisions we've made at that moment is mixed at best, right?

Sometimes we've chosen God's ways, been willing to do things his way and follow his path even though it doesn't make sense to us

and sometimes we've looked at it and said "No way! I'm not doing it that way."

Joshua is at this fork in the road, let's see which road he chooses.

⁶ So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it." ⁷ And he ordered the army, "Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord." ...¹¹ So he had the ark of the Lord carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there.

So it looks like from the way the story is written that there's a straight line between God's commands and what Joshua does

Now it'd be interesting to know what the conversations around the camp-fire were like that night!

This would be the scene in the office where everyone's debriefing the email memo that just went out company-wide announcing the new policy about Pokemon Go during lunch breaks!

Likely if the army knows about this plan, they're wondering who came up with this plan, let's see how it unfolds:

¹² Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. ¹³ The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the Lord and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the Lord, while the trumpets kept sounding. ¹⁴ So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

At which point, the men in the army are ready to kill those seven guys on the seven trumpets!!

¹⁵ On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. ¹⁶ The seventh time

around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!"

Now pause here for a second: what evidence has God given them in the past 6 days that he's going to give them the city? Zero!

And yet, what does Joshua command and so confidently declare?

SHOUT! For the Lord HAS GIVEN, past tense, already done, already signed, sealed and delivered, HAS GIVEN you the city!

One person in my small group this past week very aptly described it as a JOYFUL confidence.

On what basis is Joshua so very confident? On what basis does Joshua know that these walls will fall down and that the city will be theirs?

I want to propose to you that Joshua's joyful confidence is comprised of two things: God's promises and their obedience.

First, God has promised! God promised earlier that he'd deliver this very specific thing to them, the city of Jericho

but this blessing and this gift from God requires that they follow the path of God

And so God has made conditional promises: if you do it this way, this is the result or outcome that I promise you

And this gift is waiting for them at the end of the path of God that they have walked faithfully for the past 6 days.

Maybe they felt silly or stupid. Maybe they were confident and expectant.

But either way, they did it. They were willing to do things God's way, to follow his path, and now Joshua can declare with confidence that God will act.

See, ***at the intersection of God's promises and our obedience is a holy confidence that fuels us to be strong and courageous.***

[Image: vertical line] Throughout Scripture we get amazing, life-changing, eternal promises of blessings and favor and grace and love that are both for this life and the next

[Image: horizontal line] And very often, in order to receive those promises and *to experience the grace promised to us*, it requires *that we're willing to walk the Path that God has laid out for us*

Very often, in order to receive the fullness of the grace of God, it requires that we're willing to do things that are not how we'd usually or most naturally would want to do things

But when we're willing to walk the path of God into the promises of God, right there at that intersection, that's where we can have a holy confidence that God will meet us, that God will show up, that God will deliver on his promises

And that confidence helps to fuel us to be strong and courageous.

A holy confidence is not an arrogance. It is a confidence that recognizes that this situation, this problem, this obstacle is not going to overcome me, not going to define me—why?

Because I'm so skilled? Because I'm so great? Because I've worked so hard?

Nope, because the battle belongs not to me but to who? To the Lord.

Now this doesn't always mean that things go exactly the way that we might like. Here, the promise is very specific and outcome is very concrete

But when we lean into the promises of the Lord, trust in the Lord with all of our hearts and lean not on our own understanding, as the Proverbs instruct us

And when we're willing to walk the path that he's laid out for us and instructed us to walk in

What that means is that we can pitch our tents and live here at this place of holy confidence, even if we meet opposition, set-backs, disappointments and frustrations

If we're camped out here at the intersection of God's promises and our obedience, we can be confident that God will show up and do what only God can do, even when we experience challenges or discouragement

Earlier today, Steve Tamayo shared with y'all the latest on the Pittsboro Campus launch:

we're gearing up for renovations, things are in motion, we're hopeful to launch this thing later this fall.

We first announced this back in January and those of you who were here know that we put a target launch date of late-August.

And what's happened since then is that we've regularly gotten up front here and given you updates and told you that we were running into little delays.

Any of you ever done a construction or remodeling project? How many of you have ever had small or huge delays! Yeah, us too!

In fact, at just about every turn, we've had these very normal but very annoying little difficulties. And so we've been persevering through these little annoying difficulties and set-backs, Steve has particularly been persevering through these small set-backs

And we've been persevering through these challenges and trying to stay strong and courageous amidst obstacles

in part because we've been camped out right here at this corner of God's promises and our obedience

We're trusting God's promises—not that he's promised us that we'll launch this wildly successful new venture in Pittsboro, we don't know if it'll be successful or not!

The promises that we're coming back to over and over again as we pray is that God loves Chatham County more than we do, that God loves Pittsboro more than we do.

We're trusting that God loves his church. We're trusting that he is good and for us

We're trusting that his plan and his desire is to bring renovation, restoration, redemption, reconciliation to the world including to more parts of Chatham County

We're remembering and praying through God's many promises that are alive and apply here to our community

AND we're also at points looking back over the PATH that we've taken to get here:

all last fall we prayed as a leadership team and we sought the Lord and we felt confident then and we feel confident now that the Lord moved in that process

And so we're confident that in spite of the small little delays, God has given us a job to do in Pittsboro to serve more of Chatham County.

We're confident that God has gone ahead of us and prepared good works in advance for us to do as a church

We're trying to stay camped out at the intersection of God's promises and our obedience, because that's the place where we can have a holy confidence that fuels us to be strong and courageous

even though the walls haven't miraculously come tumbling down like they're going to here in Joshua.

That's where I've been over these past many weeks, that's how I'm needing to fight to remain confident and strong and courageous.

What about you? Where do you need fuel to be strong and courageous?

Where are you struggling to remain confident in God's goodness in the face of obstacles and opposition?

This morning, I want to invite all of us here to set up a little tent village at the intersection of God's promises and our obedience, that we might all walk confidently into a strong and courageous life

There's a virtuous cycle for us individually and collectively when we experience God meeting us at this intersection.

When we hear God's promises and when we act in faith on those promises, we meet the Lord, and that fuels us to take another step of obedience

God, you were faithful last time, you'll be faithful again next time:

God, I didn't want to step into the Jordan river at flood stage, but when you told me to and when I did, you were faithful to part the Jordan River

So we trust that you'll be faithful to break down the walls of Jericho

God, I didn't *want* to tell the truth and own up to my part in what happened at work last week, but when I ignored what I naturally wanted to do and did it your way and told the truth, good things happened.

There were still consequences but I had a deep and settled peace about it.

When we camp out here at the intersection of God's promises and our obedience to walk in his path, we start to have experiences where God shows up, sometimes in surprising ways!

And when we do this together in community, we have stories to share with one another of God's faithfulness that can spur us on individually and corporately

And to close out the story and to close out our time in Joshua, here's what happened to them as they camped out and worked out of the corner of God's promises and their obedience to God's path:

20 When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.

Joshua has heard and trusted in God's promises, he's done the counter-intuitive thing that God has asked him to do, and the result is God delivers on his promises.

It doesn't always happen this dramatically, but when we are willing to put ourselves at that corner of God's Promises and our obedience to walk in God's Path, God shows up, over and over again.

Over the years when I've had my doubts about this whole Christian thing and when I've struggled to believe, here's what I keep coming back to over and over again:

When I walk in this path and I build my life around God's promises, it does produce good things in my life. It bears good fruit, not just for me but very often for the people around me.

And this morning, for this week's Take-WITH, I want to ask you a simple question:

1. What would it take to get you to live right now at the intersection of God's promises and obedience to walking God's path?

It's two parts: not just promises without our active obedience, not just raw obedience apart from lavish promises—it's both

And some of you **don't know God's promises**, don't know the grace and the mercy and the life that God offers us, especially through Jesus

If that's you, how about this week you spend just **7 minutes a day reading the book of John**, it's one of the biographies of Jesus in the New Testament, and you're just looking for his promises

Read 7 minutes a day, you'll likely get through the whole book by Friday if you start today

You're just looking for the promises of God on offer to you, start to write those down in one long list.

And at the end of the week, step back and ask yourself and ask God to help you to understand and start to move towards and lean into those promises

For others of us, we know the promises and we know the path, at least enough of the path, **we just need to make some different decisions**

For some of you, you just need to offer yourself this morning to the Lord to walk his path wherever he's positioned you to do so this week or in this season

Maybe there's something going on at work or at home that you know you need to deal with or come clean about

Maybe there's someone that God wants you to forgive

maybe there's something that God wants you to do with the time he's given to you or the money he's given to you or the gifts or abilities he's given to you

maybe you just need to sign up for a Chatham Serves project and serve somewhere, maybe that's your step of moving into that intersection of God's promises and the path of obedience he's laid out for you

For some of you, it's going to mean committing to come alongside this Pittsboro campus plant.

The staff team, elders, deacons, the multi-campus team, we're praying and working hard to stay at the intersection of God's promises and God's path so that we might be strong and courageous

And we're inviting each of you to be strong and courageous with us.

We want you to pray for this with us. Even if you know you're not going to Pittsboro, we want to invite you to pray for it, maybe even to join us for Pittsboro prayer tonight!

Maybe God is calling you to drive and pray around PBO once a day for the next 6 days and then on the 7th day to drive around 7 days and then shout as loud as you can and see what happens!
Let me know if you do that, I'll join you in the shouting!

Regardless, we want you to camp out at the corner of God's promises and our obedience and pray with us that God will give us favor and make a way.

And we want you to consider going. We want each of you to at least think about whether or not God would lead you to help get this off the ground
to help start this new work and be a part of a new thing that God's doing in Pittsboro.

Would walking into God's promises and walking the path of obedience and dwelling on the corner of those two things, would it lead you to be strong and courageous and GO to the new campus?

If it's not, that's great. If so, we invite you to go and see the amazing things that God will do as we take this small step of faith

And if you're not going, just know that we'll need more help here as well as at the new campus as we send off anywhere from 40-80 people from this place to start something new.

We'll be needing people to help with kids and with Sunday crew and with hospitality and the worship team and tech teams and if you haven't quit found your spot yet, we're going to ask you to find it somewhere

Whether you're staying here or helping to launch the new Pittsboro campus, we'll be inviting everyone to camp out at the corner of God's promises and our obedience

And specifically we'll be asking everyone to pray and to serve so that we might see what God might do in our midst and around us in our community.

As we close this series, I want to invite us individually and as a community to be strong and courageous.

I want to invite you to press through and overcome fear or anxiety on the one hand and the allure of comfort on the other hand

So that you might live according to the image of God put inside you, that you and that we together might live a strong and courageous life, as a strong and courageous community, no matter what comes our way in the weeks and months ahead.