

God's Call to Faith and to Fight

Let's pray and then give God's word our full attention and reverence as we read it together.

Josh. 1:1-2 – Let's not miss the emotionally charged context of these opening verses. Moses was a great leader – the greatest leader Israel would ever have until Jesus came. Moses was Joshua's mentor. All of Israel, including Joshua, are in a state of shock and loss. But God says, *Moses my servant is dead...so it's time for you to move on and take some new land.* Not time to weep. Not time for Joshua to slowly build some credibility as a new leader. No, Moses is gone, now get going, God says.

There is an important lesson in this for all of us: no one is indispensable in God's plan. It's humbling but it's healthy for us to recognize that God's plan is far, far bigger than you or me, it started long before we were born, and will continue long after we are gone, and God doesn't need us to accomplish it. It reminds me of a poem I read years ago called *The Indispensable Man*.

*Sometime when you're feeling important;
Sometime when your ego's in bloom;
Sometime when you take it for granted,
You're the best qualified in the room:
Sometime when you feel that your going,
Would leave an unfillable hole,
Just follow these simple instructions,
And see how they humble your soul.*

*Take a bucket and fill it with water,
Put your hand in it up to the wrist,
Pull it out and the hole that's remaining,
Is a measure of how much you'll be missed.
You can splash all you wish when you enter,
You may stir up the water galore,
But stop, and you'll find that in no time,
It looks quite the same as before.*

*The moral of this quaint example,
Is to do just the best that you can,
Be proud of yourself but remember,
There's no indispensable man.*

God loved Moses and used Moses, but God's plan wasn't dependent on Moses and it's not dependent on us either. It's good for us to see ourselves as a small part in a big plan. Let's read on... (vv. 3-9)

The book of Joshua is all about taking new land. The first four chapters are about entering the land, the middle section is about taking the land, and the last section is about living in the land. God commissions Joshua to lead His people to take new land, to expand their boundaries and establish their homes in a new place – the place God is giving them.

It's a picture of the way God wants to expand our lives in kingdom usefulness and fruitfulness. A picture

of us growing and thriving and flourishing, as opposed to our lives shrinking and shriveling and barely making it. Jewish tradition holds Joshua to be a prophetic book and I believe it has a timely prophetic word for Grace Community Church in this season, calling us to believe God for new land together. Two areas:

- The new land of a strengthened sense of community and going deeper in our relationships.
- The new land of a stronger, clearer witness for Christ in our community. Let's pray for God to shine the love of Jesus to those around us. Let's pray God uses our community outreach next Saturday to sow seeds of God's love in people's hearts. Grab 20 invites and give them out or put them in doors this week.

It can also be a prophetic word to us on a personal level. Maybe you are praying and hoping for growth and change in your life. Maybe there's a longing to experience Christ in a deeper way and see your life to bear more fruit for His glory. You're believing God to help you take new land. Joshua has a word for you.

Or maybe that was you...yesterday. You felt like you knew what God was calling you to do, where He was calling you to go, who He was leading you to reach out to, only to encounter all kinds of challenges and problems along the way, maybe things even fell apart. And now you're thinking "been there, done that". So when you hear a message on taking new land, you can't help but feel somewhat cynical. "I tried that – didn't work!"

I totally get where you're coming from. As the pastor of GCC for sixteen years, I've made bold predictions about what I thought God was doing. I remember a ministry leader's meeting in 2007 where I confidently pronounced the watchword of the year was BHAG. It's a term from Jim Collins book Built to Last and it means "Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals." I was full of faith that we were gonna set some BHAGs and take some BHAL (big, hairy, audacious land)!

Four years later, in a similar ministry leader's meeting I downsized us to what I called S-BURs. It's a term I came up with and it means Small, Bald, Unimpressive Realities." It was my way of acknowledging that the BHAG thing didn't work out quite the way I thought. The truth is over the years we've prayed for some big new land. Some land we've taken and some we haven't. Joshua speaks to that.

Joshua is a story of faith and it's a story of fight. Because the land God is calling them to isn't sitting empty. There are foreign nations residing there and they aren't too excited about handing the keys over to Israel. So they will need faith and they will need fight to take the land and if we are to take new land for God's glory and see our lives expand outward in kingdom purposes and usefulness and live in the goodness of God's blessing we will also need faith and fight. God calls us to faith...and to fight.

Now I'm not talking about our salvation. We don't fight for our salvation. Jesus, our Joshua, has won the battle against sin, the flesh, and the devil once and for all on the cross. We believe in Jesus and rest in his finished work on Calvary for entrance into heaven and all the eternal blessings God has for us. We never have to fight to be "more saved" or "more loved" by God. Jesus did that and we rest in his work.

But as Christians secure in our salvation, we experience more or less of God's grace and favor in our lives, seeing the boundaries of our lives increase or decrease depending on our faith – no surprise there – but also on our fight. When it comes to taking new land in our lives and expanding the borders of our

kingdom fruitfulness, we need faith to believe God's promises and we need to fight to receive God's promises. Let's see these two aspects of taking new land at work in Joshua's life.

1. We need *faith* to believe God's promises

In the opening nine verses God gives Joshua three promises.

- I will give you the land - *"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. (vv. 2-3)*
- I will be with you - *⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. (vs. 5)*
- I will give you prosperity and success in everything you do. *For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (vs. 8)*

These promises are meant to fix Joshua's eyes on God. Not on the land, or the enemies, or Moses, but on God. God's promises, God's power, God's presence, God's purposes.

Sometimes we try to take new land in our strength. We set some BHAGs and then work to make them happen, but we're trying to expand our lives by our own efforts and abilities. It doesn't really matter if we achieve those goals or not, we can't take the land God has for us in our own strength. George MacDonald said, *"In whatever man does without God, he must fail miserably or succeed more miserably"* The book of Joshua isn't about what Joshua can do, it's about what God can do. Its message isn't us setting audacious goals, it's God giving audacious promises.

I want to encourage you, no matter what's going on in your life, or how bad or discouraging it looks, fix your eyes on God and His faithfulness. God has new land for you to take – good land. And no matter where you are, you can get there from here. God will help you. He is with you.

I was recently reminded of this firsthand as a situation arose that really knocked me for a loop. I didn't have answers for it, knew that things were out of my control, and I couldn't see good land anywhere. I didn't know what to do or what direction to go. I would love to say that I looked to God with faith and trust, but my faith was pretty pathetic. But God came through and worked things out in a way better than I thought possible. I have seen God do that over and over in my life.

We can never stray far from faith in our Christian walk. Faith gets its eyes off us, off our problems, our enemies, our challenges, and fixes our eyes on God and His faithfulness. God will be faithful no matter what (cause that's who He is), but we can save ourselves a lot of fretting, a lot of trips around the same mountain, a lot of wandering in the wilderness by getting our eyes on God and believing His promises. We need faith to believe God's promises.

But in these nine verses we see another component to taking new land:

2. We need to *fight* to receive God's promises

God gives Joshua three promises: I will give you the land, I will be with you, and I will give you success and prosperity, in order to fix Joshua's confidence on God. But these promises weren't given to

neutralize Joshua, they were given to *energize* Joshua for the fight that lay ahead. Let's look at each promise again:

a. *God promised to give them the land –but they had to fight to take the land*

The land God was giving them was already occupied by foreign nations and these pagan nations weren't too eager to hand over the keys to the Israelites. God says, I'm giving it, all you need to do is take it. Oh, but there are powerful nations living in it and you will need to fight for it.

Let's go back to that person who tried taking new land and everything seemed to go wrong. You hit roadblocks and challenges. Nothing worked out the way you thought and in response you've pulled back. The boundaries of your life are getting smaller rather than expanding. Rather than expanding relationships and ministry and trusting God in new ways and for new things, you're shrinking in all of these things. And part of it is, you feel let down by God. Disappointed. God failed you once, not gonna let it happen again.

But what if God didn't mean to give you that bigger land without a fight? In fact, wanna know a secret? God says in Judges 3 that He deliberately left some enemies in the land so Israel *would learn how to fight*. Maybe the setbacks, the disappointments, the failures weren't meant to make you give up, they weren't meant by God to teach you to fight.

Any new land we set out to take, any changes for the better we aim to make, any expansion of ministry we as a church set out to accomplish, probably won't come easy. More than likely it will be hard fought land. There may be discouraging setbacks and issues to work through. The book of Joshua isn't a straight line from blessing to blessing, success to success. There are defeats, mistakes, setbacks, mess-ups along the way. But there's something about fighting to take what God has given us that causes our faith in Christ grow deeper and richer. And that's what God is about in our lives.

b. *God's promise to be with Joshua was to help him fight his fight against fear*

As God calls Joshua to step into Moses shoes, lead Israel, and face unknown enemies, God knows Joshua is struggling with fear. Serious fear – God says don't be dismayed. Dismay is fear so bad it doesn't know what to do or where to turn. God says, be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed for I will be with you wherever you go. The first fight Joshua will face is a fight with fear.

Is that a fight you're familiar with? Sometimes we want to stay in the familiar boundaries we're used to because we're afraid of the unknown. We can either deal with the fears by saying, "I'll just stay put. I won't make that change, won't try to grow in that area, won't take the risk of reaching out to that person, won't step into that opportunity, won't volunteer to serve in that ministry" or we can remind ourselves that it may be hard, it may be risky, it may be uncomfortable, but God is with us to help us. It's a promise God gives us to help us fight fear. Over and over again in the scriptures God calls us to fight fear, not by avoiding the thing we fear, but by knowing God promises to be with us.

c. *God promises Joshua prosperity and success – if he obeys God's word*

This is a conditional promise: you will make your way successful and prosperous *if...* And here's a little recognized fact about Israel and Joshua: they never did expand to the boundaries God said He'd give

them *if* they obeyed His word. Even at their biggest point they fell far short of the boundaries God said was possible. God blessed them (with some defeats and mess along the way) but to this day they've never experienced the expanse God intended to give them. They expanded under Joshua's leadership but never realized the full potential God meant for them.

God didn't tell Joshua, "do whatever you want and it will succeed." God said *if* you do My will you will succeed. Align your life to My word, align your life to My purposes, and you will succeed and prosper. This might be hard for us to admit, but how many of our defeats and failures and heartaches are because we step out of God's will and try to do our will instead?

I've seen in my own life and other Christians: we can love Jesus and be saved and destined for heaven, but have things falling apart in our lives because of areas of our lives that aren't aligned with God's word.

God doesn't define success the way America defines success. Success isn't getting that promotion or making lots of money or having lots of things or being admired by lots of people. God defines success as living the life He has charted for us. Prosperity is fulfilling God's purposes for our life. When we pursue success and prosperity by disobeying God's word, we are heading towards a world of hurt. We will either fail miserably or succeed more miserably. God is the architect of our lives and He knows the best way for us to live. God says, "If you align your life with My word and My will, then you will be prosperous and have good successful."

God has new land for us to take. Our salvation is settled in Christ, our eternal home – the ultimate promised land - has been secured for us by Christ. But the boundaries of our life can be bigger or smaller, greater or lesser, more or less fruitful, bring more or less glory to God, experience more or less joy, depending on how much or little we align our lives to God's will and purposes. The good news is we can get there from here – no matter where "here" is. God is always ready to forgive and restore us when we repent of our ways and return to His ways.

We aren't meant to fight this fight alone. God is with us. But we are also meant to fight the good fight of faith together. We'll see that next week. God calls us to take new land together. If the Lord is convicting you of a specific way you've stopped fighting to take new land, maybe tell a trusted brother or sister. Ask them to fight with you by praying for you and lovingly keeping you accountable.

We need faith to believe God's promises, and we need to fight to receive God's promises. Let's encourage each other in Christ to fight the good fight of faith.