

Fighting For Each Other

Please turn with me to Joshua 1. If you're visiting us, we are in a series called *Joshua: a Journey of Faith*. Last week we looked at God's commissioning of Joshua to lead Israel over the Jordan into the land God promised to give them. Read **Josh. 1:10-11**

Joshua calls the leaders together and says after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the moment has finally come for us to enter the land God is going to give us. Get everyone ready cause in three days we cross the Jordan and begin to fight for the land God is giving to us.

We don't want to miss the emotional impact of this moment. For the past 40 years they have been wandering homeless in the wilderness. Before that they lived in a foreign land, Egypt, for 400 years much of that time as slaves. They were longing for a place they could call home.

When Janice and I felt the Lord calling us to leave Long Island and move to the Philadelphia, our family began a season where we moved 6 times in four years and lived with three different families for two of those four years. There were many blessings in the time, but there was also an unsettled feeling – we longed for a home. Not just a house, but a sense of home, belonging, established life where we can put down roots, our kids don't have to make new friends and say goodbye to them a short while later. That was 4 years. Israel has been living in someone else's home for 400 years and wandering for 40 more.

God's promise to give them their own land, a blessed land overflowing with resources represented God's covenantal faithfulness to them and His blessing over them. It was a symbol of their lives established and thriving and flourishing rather than a displaced people living in bondage.

It's a picture of our lives in Christ. Taking the land in Joshua is a physical symbol of the spiritual work of God's blessing in the believer's life, establishing and enriching our lives with the riches of Christ. It doesn't mean we make a lot of money and buy a lot of property and have a lot of things, rather it represents our lives and relationships freed from the bondage of sin and thriving and flourishing – what Jesus called the abundant life. Lives that are expanding in kingdom joy and love and fruitfulness.

And like the Israelites, God gives us this land by His power but we need to fight to take possession of it. 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. So 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 God's word and our experience teaches us that we do have to fight for our sanctification. We have to fight against sin, fight against the fiery darts of the devil's accusations, fight for greater kingdom fruitfulness in our lives, fight to see others come to know the love of Christ through our witness. And what we're about to read in Joshua gives us an important aspect of that fight. Read **Joshua 1:12-18**

Joshua says to the leaders, get everyone ready to cross the Jordan, and then he turns to three tribes, the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and he reminds them of a promise they made to Moses which is found in Numbers 32. Israel is still in the wilderness heading towards the Jordan, towards the promised land, and they fight and defeat the Moabites and these three tribes look at the land

of the defeated Moabites and say, “we tend sheep and cattle – it’s what we do - and this land is perfect grazing land for our flocks. We don’t need to cross the Jordan; we’ve found our home right here!”

This makes Moses incredibly angry because he thinks they’re just trying to get out of fighting for their Jewish brothers and he is about to call God’s judgment down on them when they set him straight:

*¹⁶ Then they came near to him and said, “We will build sheepfolds here for our livestock, and cities for our little ones, ¹⁷ **but we will take up arms, ready to go before the people of Israel, until we have brought them to their place...** ¹⁸ We will not return to our homes until each of the people of Israel has gained his inheritance. Numbers 32:16-17*

Moses, we’re not trying to get out of fighting for the promised land. We’ll make our home here, but then we’ll leave our wives and children and cattle and cross the Jordan and fight right alongside our brothers and we won’t return to our own homes until all of Israel has the land God promised us. You helped us fight for our land, we’ll have fight for yours.

I believe there is a timely word for GCC in this part of the story. God always has new land for the church to take and the new land I have felt God wants to expand us in is 1) deepening our sense of community as a church, and 2) expanding our gospel reach to the surrounding community. In other words, loving each other more and sharing the love of Jesus with those who don’t know him more. Let’s consider two lessons we here are GCC can learn and apply from the outstanding example of these three tribes:

I. God wants us to be a community that fights for each other

What is amazing about this passage is that these three tribes are willing to lay it all on the line, risk their lives, maybe never go back to their wives and children, and all this for a fight that doesn’t directly benefit them or their families. They’re not going to add one square foot of land to their possession, they’re fighting because they feel a responsibility to fight beyond the borders of their own personal interests and fight for each other as part of a community, a people – God’s people.

Through the saving work of Jesus Christ God has made us His people, and God calls us to love one another, care for one another, help carry each other’s burdens, and fight, not only to take new land for ourselves, but to help each other take new land. God doesn’t want the church to be a crowd, He wants it to be a community. God doesn’t want church to be a formality, He wants it to be a family.

You know, God has placed deep within each of us a longing to be in community. To be part of something bigger than us. To belong to a tribe, a team, a people. American culture doesn’t lend itself to community. We have a lot of strengths but community isn’t one of them. Many people, even in church, live in isolation outside of any real sense of community. But when we come to Christ, we are joined not only to Christ but to each other as brothers and sisters, as living stones being built together, as a community.

Let’s face it, in this community are introverts who are happy with less social interaction, and extroverts who want a lot of social interaction. Neither are wrong, it’s just how God made us. But no matter what our personality type, none of us can do this thing called life alone. None of us can live it well in isolation. None of us can carry the heavy burdens alone that life can throw at us. None of us can fight the fierce enemies that want to tear us up alone. None of us can fully grow in maturity in Christ alone. None of us can take the land God intends for us to take alone.

And we aren't meant to. God wants us to fight each other's battles so that we take more land together than any of us could ever do alone!

When I look at GCC, I see a church family that is already doing this, a church family that really cares about one another and wants to help each other take new land and carry each other's burdens. I've watched so many of you step up to help carry one another's burdens many, many times over the years and I love this church for that!

Yeah, we might not always know how to do it and we mess up at times. At times we may allow selfishness to cause us to miss opportunities. We all have our own lives to live and responsibilities to take care of and it can be challenging to know how to balance the two, but a loving and caring community is who we are, and the exciting thing is God wants to expand our boundaries so we do it better. So that we grow as a community that fights for each other!

II. God wants us to be a community that fights for the spreading of the gospel

The Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh know they're a part of a community and have a responsibility to fight for their brothers. But there's something else motivating them to want to fight for their brothers and that is they know that the bigger purposes of God at work here and they want to be a part of that work! On one level they are helping their people get their inheritance. On a bigger level they are a part of God establishing His people, His kingdom, in the land.

In the church God calls us to care and fight for each other, but that is always with the backdrop of our bigger mission of spreading of the gospel to our community and beyond. Our mission is bigger than just us loving us. He calls us on a rescue mission to help lost and perishing people find the Savior. We don't have the power to save anyone, but God works through us, individually and corporately, to bring the lost to faith in Christ. Reaching the lost with the love of Jesus isn't optional, it's our mission.

Yesterday we had our 4th annual community pig roast event. One of the things that really blessed and encouraged me was to see how many people got involved and signed up to serve in one way or another. I want to say thank you to each and every one of you – and a special thank you to those of you who invested a ton of hours into the planning and logistics and advertising. I know there were many seeds sown and great opportunities to share the love of Jesus. But it's also a picture of how God wants to expand GCC's gospel witness to our community – we need to do it together. There's no way two or three or four people could have done what we did yesterday – it took all of us. And you know what? It was fun! A lot of work, but what a joy it was to see everyone working together for a bigger purpose. That's what God means for us, church! We need to care for each other, but we also need that bigger purpose, that bigger mission, and for the church that is sharing the gospel with people who desperately need to hear about the love of Christ.

For God to expand our reach into this community with the love of Jesus it can't be something one or two or three of us do. It has to be us. All of us. Fighting together to take new spiritual land for Jesus, fighting together for the spread of the gospel, praying for Jesus to shine the light of his saving grace through us. What Paul describes in Phil. 1:

27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. Phil 1:27

God calls us to be – and we want to be - a community striving (fighting) side by side for the faith of the gospel. We are that, and there's more land for us to take. Let me close by sharing some practical encouragements to help us on this journey of faith.

1. Sometimes we fight for others, sometimes we let others fight for us

All twelve tribes fought to clear the land that the three tribes wanted to settle in, now it's their turn to fight for the other tribes.

Life together is always give and take. Sometimes you need to fight for others. Sometimes you need to let others fight for you. Sometimes you need to carry the burden of someone else with them. Sometimes you need to let someone else carry your burden with you.

See, isolation isn't always the result of us selfishly not wanting to help someone else. Sometimes we isolate ourselves from others because we don't want to weigh them down with our burdens. For a lot of us, it's easier to fight for someone else than to ask them to fight for us. Let's understand that for it to work, sometimes we need to fight for others, sometimes we need to let others fight for us.

2. Let's proactively look for ways to get involved

It can be a challenge to balance our responsibilities to our lives and families with fighting for one another and our gospel witness as a community of faith. I get that – we can't neglect our families and we can't do everything and we're not meant to. We need to find a healthy balance. But let's be proactive about pushing past the boundaries of our own interests so we are fighting together for the bigger land God has for us to take.

Five years ago I was at a local pastor's meeting and they were talking about a retreat coming up in a month. At that time I barely made the monthly meetings - I had no interest in going to the retreat. So when the clipboard to sign up for it came my way, I didn't even look at it, I just passed it on to the guy next to me. I probably didn't have the time for it anyway.

And then one of the pastors on the leadership team began to talk about the importance of building relationships one with another, and being there for each other, praying for each other, rooting for each other, and growing as friends. The things he shared stirred something in my heart and I said, "hey, could you pass that clipboard back to me? What are the dates again?"

Sometimes we are quick to pass the clipboard. We hear about a need or an opportunity to serve and we don't even pray about it. We just pass the clipboard. Someone will do it. It's not good timing. It's inconvenient. And we can miss amazing opportunities when we do that.

I attended that retreat, had a great time began to be more committed to attend the monthly meetings and eventually they asked me to join the leadership team so I've had the privilege of helping them plan and

lead the last four retreats. Not passing the clipboard changed the trajectory of my involvement and relationships. It can do that for you as well.

Listen, we've all got to say no to some things. We all need to pass some clipboards. My point is that we shouldn't pass every clipboard, and we should pray about where we can proactively get involved. It changes everything – and it's a joy and privilege to serve Jesus with one another!

3. *Don't underestimate the encouragement you give by joining the fight*

Moses knew that if the Reubenites and Gadites bailed on the fight, it would be tremendously discouraging for the rest of Israel. He says to them, *“Shall your brothers go to the war while you sit here? ⁷ Why will you discourage the heart of the people of Israel from going over into the land that the Lord has given them?”*

Their lack of fighting would have been discouraging but imagine how encouraging it was to Joshua when they said to him, “we're with you heart and soul! Only let God be with you as He was with Moses, and we will obey your every command!” And then they echo God's encouragement to Joshua: *only be strong and courageous!*

When you come alongside a brother or sister and say, I care about your fight, how can I fight with you? it can be a tremendous boost to their faith. And as we fight to take new land in the mission of spreading the gospel, how encouraging to know we're doing it together. As each part does its part the body of Christ grows and builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:16). Let's fight to take some new land together!