

This morning I am beginning a new sermon series on the Old Testament book of Joshua, the sixth book of the Bible. But before I jump into the text, I want to briefly help you to understand a little bit about my approach to preaching. I think it's good once in awhile to step back and to help you understand what I do up here every Sunday and why. So let me take five minutes to outline three things in particular:

Preach primarily the Bible, not my thoughts. Of course, the Bible is filtered through my experience and personality, but the goal is to preach what the Bible says. I take the Bible seriously. What does it have to say to us? A sermon should not be mainly about my own thoughts. Not going to major in inspiring stories about puppy dogs and funny things my kids did, but going to do my best to preach what the Bible actually says, keeping in tradition with 2000 years of preachers, theologians, and followers of Jesus. I'm not here to entertain you but to point you to what God has said in His Word. And if you don't agree that the Bible is God's Word, but at least you will hopefully hear what it has to say. **The hope is not that you would come away saying "what a great preacher" but "what a great God."**

Preach primarily expository, not topical sermons. Expository typically means that the point of the passage is the point of the sermon. What did this passage mean in its original historical, literary, and grammatical context, and after we've done that work, what does it mean for us today. Who wrote it, and to whom did they write it? How does a passage fit into the larger context of the book, or the section of the Bible, or the overarching Biblical story? Only after you have a proper understanding of a passage in context can you then understand how it rightly applies to us today.

An expository approach means that I tend to go through books of the Bible, as opposed to topical preaching, like 5 keys to a happy marriage or how to achieve your dreams. Why? Makes it harder to skip over parts that I don't like, like Joshua. A topical approach makes it easy to pick and choose the stuff that you like and that feels relevant to people, while staying away from the stuff that is difficult or controversial in the Bible, such as the destruction of the Canaanites. I believe that a topical approach may draw more of a crowd, but also tends to reinforce a consumer mentality, as if following God is all about you, and if I don't immediately see the relevance to me, well then it's not important. I believe in the importance of relevance, but I believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and useful, and if I work hard enough, I can show you how even a book like Joshua has relevance to you today. Also, over time, you get the whole counsel of God. Old Testament, gospel, letters. In this way, you might say that a diet of topical sermons is like a diet of

candy – it’s more pleasurable, but in the end doesn’t make you healthy, while a steady diet of expository preaching might not be as exciting, but will bring you greater health in the long run. The bottom line, I believe, is that if your goal is a bigger church, preach topical sermons, but if it’s a healthier church, regardless of size, preach the Bible.

Preach gospel-centered, not moral example sermons. How does the whole story point us to Christ? It’s not primarily about moral examples that should be followed or shunned. I don’t want to leave you every work with “3 things you must do” or “be more like Joshua” so much as help you see how every story points to Jesus and to the good news of Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins, to see how He has accomplished what we could not do, and that through knowing and trusting in Him, He transforms us into the people we could never be on our own. I don’t want to preach morality, because morality can not save you.

Background to Joshua

So with that in mind, let me set the context for the book of Joshua, particularly how it fits into the overarching story of the Bible.

God creates us, humans fall into sin. God calls a seventy-five-year-old, childless man, Abram, to follow Him with his wife Sarai.

Genesis 12:1-3 - The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Part of this blessing is the promise of land.

Genesis 12:6-7 - Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 15:18-21 - On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates-- ¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

Show the map. God repeats the promise to his son Isaac, and his son Jacob.

Genesis 26:2-5 - The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. ³ Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴ I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, ⁵ because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws."

Genesis 28:12-14 - He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. ¹⁴ Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring."

Jacob's son Joseph ends up in Egypt, becomes second in command to Pharaoh, and when a famine hits, Jacob's family moves down to Egypt. Over time, a new Pharaoh arises who doesn't know Jacob's family, and the Israelites are enslaved in Egypt. Eventually God uses Moses and Aaron to lead the people out of Egypt to the land that was promised to Abraham. However, when they go to spy out the land, only Joshua and Caleb give a positive report, while the other ten spies are afraid. As a result of their disobedience and unbelief, the whole generation will wander in the wilderness for 40 years before that generation, including Moses, dies out and the next generation enters the promised land. Joshua, who is Moses's aide and also one of the military commanders, is tapped as Moses' successor, the one who will finally lead the Israelites into the promised land.

So how long did it take to fulfill this promise? **680 years**.

The book of Joshua essentially has three parts – the preparation for the conquest, the conquest of the promised land, and the division of the land.

In chapter 1, we see a great challenge, great promises, and a great calling:

The great challenge

Joshua 1:1-18 - *After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "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.*

After 680 long years, including 40 years of wandering in the Sinai desert, it is finally time to occupy the promised land. But in the first two verses, we see that there are three major challenges. **First of all**, the land God is going to give them is currently inhabited by the Canaanites, and so it's going to take some battles to gain possession of it. **Secondly**, there is raging river standing between them and the promised land, and they have no boat. And **thirdly**, Moses has just died. Deuteronomy 34 summarizes how great he was:

Deuteronomy 34:7-12 - *Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. ⁸ The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over. ⁹ Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses. ¹⁰ Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt-- to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. ¹² For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.*

These are some serious challenges. They know that they need to prepare for war. But before they can even do that, they need to figure out how to cross this river. And the one who has been leading them for the past 40+ years has just died. Can you imagine the fear and anxiety in the camp? No wonder God continues to repeat the phrase "be strong and courageous."

The great promises

Despite the great challenges that Joshua and the Israelites are facing, God encourages them with three great promises:

³ *I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates-- all the Hittite country-- to the Great Sea on the west. ⁵ No one will be*

able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them

I will give you this land. I have been promising my people this land for over 600 years, and the promise still stands. But you will need to lay hold of it.

No one will be able to stand up against you. You will be victorious.

And I will be with you as I was with Moses; I will not leave you nor forsake you.

In other words, in answer to the challenges: don't worry about the other people you will need to battle, you will be victorious. Don't worry about the river, I've got a plan and I will get you into the promised land. And don't worry about Moses. Moses may be dead, but my promise remains. In fact, it was never really about Moses, as if Moses could make those plagues happen. It was always about my presence and my power working through Moses.

The bottom line is that while the challenges may be great, God's promises and His presence will be their strength no matter what comes their way.

The great calling

Finally, the great calling.

*⁷ Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." ¹⁰ So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹ "Go through the camp and tell the people, **'Get your supplies ready.** Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.'" ¹² But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, ¹³ "Remember the command that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: 'The LORD your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.' ¹⁴ Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of*

the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers ¹⁵ until the LORD gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise." ¹⁶ Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. ¹⁷ Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. ¹⁸ Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!"

In verses 10-18, he emphasizes the need for unity among the twelve tribes of Israel. In Numbers 32, Reuben, Gad and half-Manasseh wanted inheritance east of the Jordan. Moses agreed, but only if they would join them in obtaining the Promised Land first. But they must be unified in fighting together. They need each other. Be unified.

Be obedient to my law. Notice that he calls it the book of the law. Study and meditate on my Word and be obedient to it.

Be strong and courageous. Not because God wants positive thinkers, but because I am with you. The land is yours, but you still need to actually go and get it.

Great challenge, great promises, great calling. There are battles ahead, a raging river in front of you, and your leader has died. But my promise to give you the land still stands, you will be victorious, and I will be with you. So listen to my words and follow them. Stay united. And be strong and courageous as you go and take the land that has been promised to them.

As we will see, they will eventually take the land... sort of... and live happily ever after. Well, not really. Because in the end, they never could fully obey God or any leader. And so even though they entered the land, the land never truly became the place of rest and peace that they hoped it would be. And eventually, they would lose the land and become an occupied people again. Because in the end, it wasn't really about the land, but the one to whom Joshua points. After all, Joshua is Yeshua, the same name as Jesus. As the writer of Hebrews tells us:

Hebrews 4:8-11 - *For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of*

God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

And how do we enter the rest of God?

Hebrews 4:2-3 - For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. ³ Now we who have believed enter that rest,

We enter the rest, the true promised land, by believing the gospel. And what is the gospel?

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 - Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

The book of Joshua ultimately points us to Jesus. We will focus more on that in the upcoming sermons, but for the sake of today, I want to return to the subject of courage. If you had to summarize chapter 1, you might say that it teaches us that:

Your challenges may feel overwhelming, but strength and courage are found in trusting in the presence and promises of God.

There are the challenges of being a believer.

Love the Lord with all your heart
 Love your neighbor as yourself
 Go and make disciples of all nations
 Take up your cross and follow Jesus

And there are the challenges that are more unique to you

Dealing with the coronavirus and its effects – financial, unemployment, emotional, social losses

Relational challenges

Maybe you've lost a giant in your life like Moses

Where will you find strength and courage?

I would never argue that the only way to find courage is in God. There are many courageous men and women who do not believe. And there are many pointers out there on how to find courage - Use relaxation techniques. Lean on community. Learn all you can. Practice doing scary things.

But I would argue that the best and most comprehensive source for courage is found in knowing the Lord, in trusting in the presence and promises of God.

You see, in Joshua's time of uncertainty and anxiety, he had the history of God's saving action – the exodus, the parting of the red sea, miraculous provision of food and water in the wilderness. But we have so much more. We have the one to whom Joshua points – the greater Yeshua. We have the cross and the resurrection. We know God is with us because even when he seemed absent and cruel, he was present and loving.

You may have lost a giant like Moses. You may be experiencing a void in leadership. But God's presence continues and his promises never fail. Be strong and courageous, for He will never leave you nor forsake you.

The challenges may feel overwhelming, but strength and courage is found in trusting in the presence and promises of God.

Look at the difference His presence makes:

Hebrews 13:5-6 - Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." ⁶ So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Philippians 4:12-13 - I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

I do not have to live in fear, but can find strength and courage even when I don't have much, because of His presence that strengthens me.

And we know we can never lose His presence:

Philippians 1:20-21 - *I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

And so we say:

Isaiah 41:10 - *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

And look at the difference his promises make:

Romans 8:28-32 - *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. ³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

Whatever happens, I can't lose. God is always working things together for good. And He is for me, and will give us what I need. And nothing will ever separate me from His love. And so:

1 John 4:18 - *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

2 Timothy 1:7 - *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

Do you see how much encouragement is tied up in the presence and promises of God? Like Joshua, be a person of the Word, who knows God and His promises:

Psalms 1:1-3 - *Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*

Lay hold of God's promises. You must claim them you must walk in them. They have no power unless you lay hold of them and walk by them. How can you trust in them if you don't know them?

This is not just a plea for your individual walk with God. It is a call to community, just as it was for the Israelites under Joshua. You need the encouragement of others. You were not meant to fight life's battles alone.

Hebrews 10:25 - Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Community groups.

The challenges may feel overwhelming, but strength and courage is found in trusting in the presence and promises of God. Be strong and courageous.