

Text: Joshua 1:1-11

Theme: Series- A New Year with God: Get Ready to Move

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Morning Prayer Service on 3/01/2016 at 10.30am

Let us turn our bibles to Joshua Chapter 1- We will be looking at the first eleven verses today.

Introduction

Joshua was in need of strength and courage. But God's words of command and encouragement met his need. I think they will help us too.

Besides the fact that Joshua was still grieving the loss of a great leader and friend, he had some big sandals to fill. Although he had already been apprenticed and commissioned by Moses prior to his death, Joshua was following in the footsteps of the greatest leader his people had ever known. The closing words of Deuteronomy paint a picture of Moses' exceptional relationship with the LORD and his remarkable undertakings: No prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, 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. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel. **(Deut. 34:10-12)**

We do hear the LORD tell him three times with increasing intensity: “Be strong and courageous” (v. 6), “Be strong and very courageous” (v. 7), and “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged” (v. 9). And again, at the end of the chapter, the people tell Joshua, “Only be strong and courageous!” Maybe Joshua was overwhelmed with fear at the time of his commissioning. Maybe he needed to hear these words upfront in order to draw on them for strength and courage in the future. Either way, God knew he needed this message.

For another thing, Joshua was becoming the leader of a great nation – a nation with a history of grumbling, stubbornness, and rebellion. The LORD was calling Joshua to lead a nation whose name means “wrestles with God.” One needs courage and strength to do that!

Joshua's task to lead Israel into the Promised Land is momentous for his people. Israel has been wandering in the wilderness waiting for this moment for forty years. But from a broader, theological perspective, Israel has been waiting for this for generations. Way back in the time of Abraham, before Israel even was a nation – **before Abram had any children at all – the LORD promised that Abraham's children would become a great nation, and that they would inherit the land of Canaan.**

***The LORD first tells Joshua to be strong and courageous on the basis of his promise.** The LORD tells Joshua, “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give to them” **(v. 6).** The LORD had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his offspring by means of a covenant, **whereby the LORD communicated, in essence, “May I be cut into two if I don't keep my promise to you” (Gen. 15).** From generation to generation, the LORD has proven himself faithful in keeping his word. **Joshua can be strong and courageous on the basis of God's unfailing covenant promise.**

***The second time, the LORD speaks strength and courage to Joshua, the focus is on practicing God's law (vv. 7-8).** Obeying “all the law my servant Moses gave you” provides Joshua a tether that keeps his work in continuity with that of Moses. It puts Joshua in the proper posture of humility and submission to God's will. And – because God's commands provide a reflection of God's character – following the Law of Moses keeps Joshua close to God's heart. That's the kind of leader God's people need.

***Finally, the LORD tells Joshua to be strong and courageous on the basis of God's presence.** "Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (v. 9) Ultimately, the success of Joshua's leadership – and the welfare of God's people – is dependent on the abiding and guiding presence of God. When the LORD goes with his people, they have all the reason in the world to be strong and courageous. Even when they cross rivers and rugged terrain. Even in battle. Even in the face of giants.

Over one thousand years later, it is this same God who again calls his people to his word, and promises his presence. He is the one whose name, like Joshua's, means "the LORD saves." But rather than just saving his people from physical harm, he saves them from a far greater enemy: sin itself. "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). He is the only one who has ever perfectly kept God's law, and he is the one who brings all of God's promises to fulfilment (Matthew 5:17). Just as the LORD told Joshua, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," so Jesus promises his people, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (**Matthew 28:20**).

Consider again verses 3: **Wherever You Set Your Foot (1:3-4) What does this mean?** I've always been fascinated by God's promise in Joshua 1:3: "I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses." Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the western sea." It means that where Joshua and the people actually went, physically, God would give it to them. We see the promise fulfilled in Joshua where the people won battle after battle in campaigns in both the south and north of Palestine. Where they actually went, God gave them the land. But where they didn't go, the Canaanites continued to hide out and harass them.

I think this principle also applies in other realms of our life. We want everything brought to us on a silver platter, but God tells us to go and claim it personally. We have to go out to get it, and then God will give it to us. **Spiritually, we want to grow. How will we do that? Passively? No, by believing the promises of God and desiring to see their fulfillment in our own lives. That desire will help us press through in faith and prayer, and actually grow in the Lord. He will give it to us, but we need to find a way to actually follow him there.**

God outlines the physical territory which he is giving to Israel--a huge land: "from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates--all the Hittite country--to the Great Sea on the west" (Joshua 1:4). In fact, during Joshua's time they never set their foot on all this. Most was under Israel's control by the time of David and Solomon, but then it was lost again through disobedience and unbelief. There are great tracts of "land" God would give you that are now occupied by the enemy. They belong to you. God has given them to you. When you--with God's help - push the enemy off your inheritance, you can possess it, and experience its blessings.

Recognize God's commitment (v. 5) God never leaves, never forsakes us (1:5)

This is one of the most precious promises of the Bible: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (1:5). We find it elsewhere in the Bible, too, in Deuteronomy 31:6 and Hebrews 13:5, for example. God reminded Joshua that no one would be able to stand against Israel, not because of their power, but because of His power. When we accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour, He, too, promises us His power and presence for our lives. Joshua could accept the challenge because he recognized God's promise to him. In essence, God said to Joshua, "If you accept the challenge, I'll commit myself to you."

Permanent presence

Verse 5 also carries the assurance that Joshua would never be left or forsaken. Christ has made the same commitment to us. He has given us His Spirit to live in us so we won't be alone. God's presence becomes personal when we respect God's commands.

One of the great prayers of the Bible centred on this issue. When the people of Israel rebel against God and worship a golden calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai, God has had enough: "Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey," he says, "but I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way" (Exodus 33:3). Moses' response is eloquent: "Then Moses said to him, 'If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?' And the LORD said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.'" (Exodus 33:15-17)

None of us deserves God's presence. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). But God has put our sins on Jesus and punished them there. He has filled us with his Spirit, and now abides with us. What a miracle! What grace!

This promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," is a promise about God's help, but also a promise about his discipline. Here, God meant it to encourage Joshua on this day that his leadership began.

Be strong and very courageous (1:6)

What is faith? When we understand that, we understand the key principle that underlies the book of Joshua and the whole of the Christian life. Very simply, it is believing that God will do what he says he will do. Paul puts it this way in Romans 4:20-22: "Yet [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness.'"

God gives Joshua a promise: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." Then immediately he gives him a command: "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them" (Joshua 1:5-6).

Is faith just the believing the promise? Yes. But it is believing it enough that we are strong and courageous when problems come and the obstacles appear -- and they always do.

Faith requires courage and strength, because only when we exercise courage and strength do we maintain our belief in any real way. If, at the first problem, we cave in and give up, we don't have faith, we have unbelief.

We all struggle with this. None of us is immune. Joshua was filled with God's Spirit, had worked alongside Moses, and had been on the mountain with God, and still needed this kind of encouragement.

One of the reasons you haven't grown more in your walk with God is because of your fear. Fear of people, fear that people won't approve, fear that you'll fail, fear that you'll make a fool out of yourself, fear that you aren't strong enough, fear that God will let you down. Fear. This promise and command has your name on it: **"I will never leave you or forsake you, (insert your name). Therefore be strong and very courageous!"**

Meditate on the Word (1:7-9)

Thankfully, God doesn't leave us to fend for ourselves as we try to take courage. He helps us. His instruction is:

- * **"Be careful to obey all the law.... Do not turn from it to the right or to the left" (1:7).**
- * **"Do not let this Book of the Law depart out of your mouth" (1:8a).**
- * **"Meditate it on day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it" (1:8b).**

This is what will strengthen our faith and courage: attention to God's word.

What does it mean to meditate? Do we assume a lotus position and hum? Do we erase all thoughts from our mind and try to merge our thoughts with the Great Beyond? No. That sort of thing comes from Eastern religion. To meditate means to think about, mull over, ponder.

The very kind of Bible study we're engaged in on Wednesdays involves us in the process of meditation. We have the text and a list of questions: What? Why? Where? Who? And so, we read and think and try to understand. That is meditation.

God told Joshua that he was to obey the law of God. Though Moses was gone, the law remained. To move into the land and claim victory, the people of God had to be obedient. Today God calls us to be obedient to His Word in our lives. This respect for God's Word is to be Complete. We cannot treat Scripture as a buffet line in which we pick and choose what we will obey. Joshua was to obey the entire law and to do so every day! This was not to be a weekend religion that made no difference in daily living.

For the Israelites, getting to where God wanted them meant facing their challenges with the promised presence of God and doing as God directed. Nothing has changed today. Those are still the requirements for Christians who want to move to where God wants them.

In a classic statement of the role of scripture in this, Paul writes, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

So, God's encouragement and exhortation to Joshua that day met his needs:

1. **Faith Assurance: "I will never leave you or forsake you" (1:5)**
2. **Faith Exhortation: "Be strong and very courageous" (1:6,9)**
3. **Faith Food: "Meditate on it day and night" (1:8)**

God's success formula (1:8b)

With these instructions come the keys to prosperity and success: "then you will be prosperous and successful" (1:8b).

I see bookstores full of books on "success." You can buy tapes to reprogram your mind to think successful thoughts. And so on. And much of what they say is true. But it is not complete.

- **The world says...Trust in yourself; God says...Trust in me. I will never leave you... (1:5)**
- **The world says...Boldly strive for your dream; God says Be strong and very courageous and step out to possess the land, because I will be with you (1:9)**
- **The world tempts us with the promise of prosperity and success without God. But the fact is, that whatever measure of prosperity and success we find without God will profit us nothing in the long run. Jesus tells us: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4 quoting Deuteronomy 8:3). He says, "You cannot serve God and Money" (Matthew 6:24). He says, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26)**

The order to advance (1:10-11)

Joshua has been encouraged by God. Now he begins to obey the command he has been given: to lead the people into the Promised Land. It is a small step he takes, ordering the officers to spread the word that they will break camp in three days. But he takes that first small step. That's all he needs to do today: take today's step. As he does this, day by day, God will lead him, and he will lead the people.

Notice, however, that this first step is generously flooded with faith. "Get your supplies ready," he tells them. "Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you for your own" (1:11). He declares his faith to those who are with him on the journey, and so strengthens them, too. Whom can you encourage today, as you take the next small step in your journey of faith?