

Be strong and courageous * Joshua 1:1-9
Langford Community Church * April 11, 2021 * Graham Gladstone

A year ago, when we were first getting our footing during the initial lockdown, I had a list of passages that I wanted to look at with you. I made it through most of that list with the videos that I recorded but there's one passage I didn't get to and I think today is the day to unpack that passage because I think we need to hear it this newest round of lockdown.

It's been tough hasn't it? With the vaccine going out, it seemed as though we were nearing the end of the tunnel but then all of a sudden - case numbers skyrocketed, restrictions were imposed and things just seemed to get worse.

And we're all getting tired of it. We're getting tired of not seeing family and friends and going out and doing things that were used to doing. We're getting tired of getting our hopes up and then getting them smacked down again and so I think that we need to hear what God said to Joshua as he prepared to enter the Promised Land in Joshua chapter 1.

Joshua was facing an unknown future, full of obstacles and difficulties, and so God spoke to him to prepare him for the road ahead. What God said was essentially a shot of spiritual adrenaline to bolster his flagging spirit, and that's something that we need too, so turn with me to Joshua 1 – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua – and let's hear God speak to our weary souls. Joshua 1, starting in verse 1.

NIV Joshua 1:1 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.

This was a momentous task that Joshua was about to undertake – he was about to lead a bunch of ragtag refugees across the river, to take over a land that was already occupied by people who outmatched them in almost every way. And what's more, Joshua was still pretty new to the job. He had been an aide to *Moses* – one of the big three prophets of the OT – but now Moses was gone and he had to fill those enormous shoes and lead all these people in what was really the biggest undertaking of their lives.

It's no wonder that God took him aside to give him the pep talk of his life.

Verse 2 again - 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.

Now right off the bat, God gives Joshua a big reason for confidence – did you catch it? 'Now then, you and all these people, get ready to go into the land – THAT I AM ABOUT TO GIVE THEM.' Joshua is facing a gargantuan task, but God reminds him here that he is not alone. God Himself, the sovereign God, the Creator God, is going to be doing the work. Yes, the Israelites have a role to play but ultimately it is God who is going to accomplish the takeover of the land. God is going to GIVE them the land.

And what's more, this GIVING is actually the fulfillment of a multigenerational promise that goes all the way back to Abraham.

Verse 3, He goes on -

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, (that's South to North) and from the great river, the Euphrates (that's east)--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.

There it is. Way back in Genesis 12, God swore to Abraham that He would make him great and make him into a great nation, and through him all the nations would be blessed, and now here, after so many years, God is keeping that promise. God made the promise to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob and then to the whole people of Israel through Moses – if you look at Deuteronomy 11:24 – it is word for word what God says that He will do here.

God swore that He would make His people inherit the land and that is what they are about to do.

And that is why Joshua can be confident on the road ahead. He can be 'strong and courageous' like verse 6 says because God will be with them. He can be expectant and trusting, knowing that God will bring to completion this good work that He began in Abraham's day. God finishes what He starts. Joshua can anticipate that. And what's more, God will never fail or forsake them. Just as He was with Moses, God will be with Joshua. And so Joshua and the people can be strong and courageous, trusting that God is at work in whatever lies ahead.

Now if that's the case, then what are the Israelites supposed to do? They will certainly march and manoeuvre and make tough decisions, but there is still an even more important thing that they need to do as they rely on the God who promised to be with them. And that's in verse 7.

Verse 7 - 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.

You might think that, given the circumstances, God would give the people military plans and marching orders but what's God's number one priority here? Seeing the people of God walk in God's way. Not turning from it to the right or to the left. Not getting caught up in the ways of the world, but in everything, walking in God's way in the world.

He says – Don't let the Law depart from your mouth; take time to think about it and meditate on it day and night. There is a wide road that leads to destruction but a narrow one that leads to glory – God's Word shows the way. And so it just makes sense that God's people would make walking in God's way their priority.

And then look at what He says - *Then* you will be prosperous and successful. 'Keep the Law and you will succeed.' If you think about it, that just makes sense. If God's ways are right and good, then it makes sense that they would lead to things that are right and good for the people who keep them.

If you keep the commands that your physiotherapist gives you, you're going to get stronger. If you stick to the regime of diet and exercise that your doctor gives you, you're going to be healthier. And if you keep the ways of God that He has laid before you, you're going to be better off in the end. This is so axiomatic that Charles Stanley says 'The only way to hinder the victory is through disobedience and unbelief. So no matter what you are facing or how bad the situation seems, take courage, believe in Him and do exactly as He says. With Him fighting for you, there's no reason to be afraid.'¹

Job number one for the people of God is to walk in God's way. Joshua is to make walking with God his number one priority and he can be strong, knowing that God is fulfilling His promise; those are two big themes in this passage but have you noticed that there's another one hanging around?

Verse 9 - 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."

In case you missed it, look again at Joshua 1, verse 6 –

6 "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

Verse 7 - 7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you;

Verse 9 again - 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."

Three times, God says to Joshua, 'Be strong and courageous, for I am with you wherever you go.'

Knowing that God will be with them, knowing that God was keeping His promise, knowing that God's way leads to success, the people of God could be strong and courageous on the road ahead.

That, I think, is what Joshua needed to hear. He had huge shoes to fill, taking over from Moses. He was leading a people who were notoriously fickle. And he faced an enemy that was way ahead in terms of technology and warfare. But he had an ace up his sleeve. The promise that the sovereign God of the universe would be with him.

That is adrenaline for the weary soul. That is the kind of thing that made Joshua get up and face the day with confidence and grace, knowing that God was in his corner.

And that, I think, is something that we all need to hear. The fact that God is with us means that we face whatever lies ahead with strength and courage and confidence and grace knowing that God is with us every step of the way.

So we've heard what this passage means; now let's think about what it means for us. How do we live in light of it? How do we apply the lessons of this passage in our own lives? Let me give you three thoughts.

First, be faithful and obedient. I think that's important for us to hear. When things get tough, we can start to get sloppy in our faith lives. We neglect time spent with God. We start to feel sorry for

ourselves and think that we're entitled to do whatever we want to do. We put ourselves first, we act without thinking of others, we do what we gotta do to get ahead, just as the world does.

But God calls us to a higher standard, doesn't He? He calls us to walk in His way, to live justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly our God. We don't relate to the Law of Moses the way the Israelites do, but if we are walking with Jesus, then we have the Holy Spirit in us to enable us to keep that Law without even thinking about it.

And if you want goal posts to aim for, you can't do much better than this – the 'greatest commandment' – 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and love your neighbour as yourself.' If you are faithfully aiming for that and chewing on the Word of God to learn more about who He is, then you are going to find yourself walking in the ways of God. So, be faithful and obedient.

That's the first big application, the second is this – be expectant and trusting. See, part of the confidence that Joshua could have come from the certainty that God would do whatever He had promised to do. God had promised to bring the people of Israel into the land, and since Joshua knew that God keeps His promises, he could trust that God would do what He said He would. He could even anticipate sitting in the Promised Land, eating bread and honey, and letting the promise of that pull him forward through the difficulty into what God had promised to make happen.

And we need to do the same. Jesus said 'I go before you to prepare a place for you.' Jesus said 'I will be with you even until the end of the age.' He will keep those promises. He will walk with us through this life and lead us into the next and so we can be trusting and expectant, knowing that God will do all that He has promised to do. He will never fail us or forsake us and we can be certain of that as we navigate the COVID road ahead. I know that it can feel like this will never end. But it will. God will make it happen. And we can look forward with expectation, knowing that there are good things ahead. So be trusting and expectant.

And finally, be strong and courageous for God is with you. He is with you as you get your vaccine. He is with you as you patiently endure. He is with you when you think about the vacation that you'd really like to be on but can't because of all the restrictions. Don't let the lockdown get you down. Be strong and courageous, be confident and resolute, because the God of the ages is with you.

I remember when I was a kid, I was always really nervous about going down into our basement. It was a dugout farm basement, dark and dusty and just the kind of place that a little kid wouldn't want to go. But if my mom or dad was with me, no problem, nothing could touch me. I could be strong and courageous knowing that somebody bigger than me was with me. Somebody bigger than you is with you – the Creator of Heaven and earth, the Lord God Almighty is with you. You can be strong and courageous.

Be faithful and obedient.

Be expectant and trusting.

Be strong and courageous

I think Charles Stanley is helpful here – he writes –

In many ways, adversity is like boot camp; it is rigorous, painful, and challenging. Difficulties cause us to adopt new routines and habits; to mature in physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of our being; and to grow in our relationship with the Lord.

During times of trial, we need to remain courageous and faithful. We also must stay steadfast in our devotion to the Lord as we battle feelings of doubt, fear, and limitation. He will provide the strength and hope not only to endure the hardship, but to make the changes that are required of us so we can claim the blessings of God.ⁱⁱ

That's helpful for us as we navigate the road ahead. We don't want to be here but we are. We have to walk this road, but we are not alone. The God who loved us enough to die for us is with us. So...

Be faithful and obedient.

Be expectant and trusting.

Be strong and courageous for the LORD, your God, is with you.

ⁱ *Charles Stanley Life Principles Bible Notes*, 'Life lesson' on Joshua 1:9.

ⁱⁱ *Charles Stanley Life Principles Bible Notes*, 'Answers to life's questions' on Joshua 1:6-9.