

Joshua

Joshua 1:9 - "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." Sometimes this passage is applied rather casually. We may use it when we encounter a momentary, uncomfortable situation in life. Joshua was facing nothing of the sort. He was charged with taking his people into a foreign land, where they would face armed conflict and constant danger. In all reality they were headed to war; and while the land had been given to them by God, much of it was obtained in battle. While we read the story today and see the ease with which it was accomplished, the fighting men of Israel still had to draw swords and stare the enemy in the eye. Certainly God has a plan in mind for every one of us. For Joshua and the children of Israel it was to dwell in the land of promise. No enemy can derail God's plan, but circumstances may arise that test our faith. Just as God commanded Joshua to be strong, and we ought to do the same. In the heat of battle or the calm of everyday life, we should keep God's plan in mind. If all else fails, remember Joshua's assignment; it should help to put your "difficult" situation into focus.

Joshua 2:11 - "And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath." It would be an understatement to say the blessing of God upon Israel was "well known". According to Rahab, even the fighting men of Jericho were terrified. However, their hearts did not "melt" because of the Israelite's bravery and terror in battle. It was, in fact, cowardice that had stopped them from entering the promised land forty years earlier. Instead, it was the God of Israel that made their enemies fear. He had done many wonderful, and legendary works, which armies all around had noted. The military mind is pragmatic. It measures the skill of the generals, the discipline of the foot soldiers, the circumstances of the battle, and above all: the odds. If these factors are favorable, they march boldly into battle. It is only a supernatural force that can turn these considerations upside down. The God of heaven above and earth beneath was on the side of Israel, and it was clear they could not be stopped. What conclusion have you reached about Jehovah? Rahab made a decision, by faith, to trust in this "one and only" God with her entire life. I would encourage you to do the same.

Joshua 3:7 - "And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." Joshua was about to gain the confidence of Israel. They would need it for the challenges that lay ahead. He and Caleb failed to convince their parents to obey forty years earlier, but this new generation had no fear of giants. They were ready to follow the leader God had chosen. It was not Joshua's personality or leadership style that persuaded them. The Lord was at work all along preparing both leader and followers. We are never successful in carrying out spiritual work without God's enabling. He chose to use Joshua, just as he had chosen to use Moses years before. He was not ready to complete his mission until he encountered the burning bush. This was a similar moment for Joshua. It was the day His Father had chosen to begin His process of magnification in the sight of Israel. None of it was done for the glory of men. Today we instead praise the Lord for keeping His promises to Israel; just as He intended when He said these words.

Joshua 6:1-2 - "Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour." This is a reminder from God on the eve of doubt. He points to the reality of Jericho's fear, assuring His chosen leader, and preparing him for some difficult instructions. Let's not fool ourselves; Joshua was not a spiritual superman. The coming battle plan sounded as "unconventional" to him as it does to us. It was the assurance of God that made Joshua press forward. We ought to seek the same today. While there will be moments when we think twice about the Father's command, we must not let human understanding rule. Sometimes every piece of conventional (worldly) wisdom tells us we are fools. That is why we listen for the voice of God in the study of His word. Military experts may scoff, so-called experts will ridicule, but every man is a liar when God has spoken. Our greatest privilege is the development of our relationship with the Savior, but that is also our greatest task. In serving Him we must put His desires and thoughts far above those of our sinful world.

Joshua 7:25 - "And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones." Trouble of this kind often comes after a major victory. Achan made the same calculation we often make regarding our sin; counting on its not being discovered. The problem is that sin never affects only one person. The secret evil of this one man derailed an entire nation. It seems to have been harshly dealt with here, though the punishment came at God's command. Our own unrighteous actions should be just as decisively eliminated. If the plan of God is in jeopardy due to besetting sin, stoning and burning would not be out of line. I speak, of course, of the behavior, not the person. Repentance is all about turning to the Savior, with the total and complete abandonment of the sin that kept us from Him. Achan was not totally unlike us, but we are not likely to meet his end for unrighteousness. Our challenge is to learn a lesson from his death, and Israel's failure; eliminating sin with both timeliness and precision.

Joshua 10:11 - "And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Bethhoron, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword." I really appreciate the way God becomes directly, physically involved with this conflict. It is the kind of action God often takes in a long season of obstacles. He seems to provide us with specific and visible signs of His guidance both to bless and reassure. We should choose to trust the Lord without such outward signs, still, He displays His affection and grace by granting them. It must have been amazing to see these mighty hailstones. They were an unmistakable sign of divine intervention on behalf of Israel. Not only did they encourage the Hebrews, they also made an indelible impression on the enemy of the day, and any potential future foes. These are the type of stories the critics dismiss as fiction or coincidence; don't believe them. God is in the business of blessing His people with mighty, miraculous, and unusual acts. Not many are as dramatic as this one, but all affirm His unwavering faithfulness to His servants.

Joshua 11:18-19 - "Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle." Even God-given victory takes time, and sometimes excruciating effort. What's more, it often faces great opposition. While enemies surround us, our success is never in doubt. Our job is to trust the Lord through each individual moment of trial. The challenge is to focus on the promise, and have confidence in the character of the One who made it. Israel was constantly confronted, but never in danger of loss. Believers in Christ may face persecution. We have the hope of heaven in our hearts, and the promise of God, as He will bring it to pass. We can also be certain that He will work all things together for good. These assurances should keep us in consistent obedience to Him. He is just as trustworthy, loving, and kind in the midst of war. When Joshua had a moment to look back on this season of constant battle, I am certain he treasured his relationship with God through every moment. He, like us, should not have taken consolation in final victory, but in the God of final victory.

Joshua 13:1 - "Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the LORD said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." It's fascinating that the Lord has to inform Joshua about his own situation. The passage captured my attention, because I sometimes notice how unaware we can be about our age and health. Joshua was old; I wonder how much he understood or realized it? Whatever the situation, God chose to inform him of the facts. The first possibility is that Joshua was all too well aware of his infirmities, wondering just how he could accomplish the last portion of the task God had given him. The other possibility is that Joshua was fooling himself about his age, believing he had just enough left in him to go "one more round". Either way, God injects a dose of reality into the situation that serves as a comfort. Sometimes hearing the truth actually helps, rather than hurts. What's more is that it's better hearing it from God than anyone else. Our job is to listen, then take action on what we hear.

Joshua 14:7-8 - "Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadeshbarnea to espy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart. Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt: but I wholly followed the LORD my God." Caleb is one of my favorite men in the Bible. He and Joshua stood alone for the Lord on the other side of the Jordan. It was not reckless bravery that caused them to believe Israel could win their battle with giants; they took God at His word. Caleb did what was "in his heart". That is the main factor in any act of obedience. If our hearts are right with God, "wholly" following Him wherever He leads, we can expect ultimate success. You'll notice that the time-line for this success was not exactly within the plans of the men who followed. I suppose that it's human nature to expect things will happen right away, but God does not work in the realm of human time. His plans took forty years to carry out, and in a way, some of the promises to Israel have yet to be fulfilled. It is not our job to count days and weeks. We should instead live with the commitment of Caleb, to serve the Lord every day, with all of our heart.

Joshua 20:4 - "And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them." It is amazing how God displays His character in every action and instruction. His mercy was built into the plans for Israel! These cities of refuge display His concern for justice in the lives of the falsely accused. Many will read through the Old Testament, seeing only the "harsh" judgment of God. Believers should observe instead His wonderful, loving attributes. In a sinful culture, the accused are often treated with immediate condemnation, with no regard to their actual guilt or innocence. God chose to grant them a place of mercy, fair trial, and a chance for safety. This did not change the hearts of the people, but it did give them a system within which they could operate, maintaining a Godly level of fairness. I wonder how well we would work within the system if we lived in a city of refuge? Would we feel comfortable with accused murderers "dwelling among" us? That's what I was wondering as I read this verse. Do you have an answer?

Joshua 21:44 - "And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand." This must have been a

great day in Israel! The people were at peace in the land of promise, knowing God was faithful, and that He alone had given them victory. Glory for every victory in life must go to the Lord. The rest Israel was experiencing did not come from the simple end of conflict. It came as a result of their faith in a God that never let them down. Rest for the souls of men today comes in the very same way. Though the flesh seeks freedom from the restriction and sacrifice of a life committed God, obedience is the only way to achieve release. Remember the forty years of wandering in the wilderness? It came as a result of Israel taking action outside God's plan. Consider also their obedience during this campaign. Relief from the oppression of enemies came when Israel surrendered to the Father. That pattern still holds true. Looking for freedom? Obtain it by surrendering your life to the Lord.

Joshua 24:15 - "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." A man of God can present his people with the options, but he cannot force them to choose his path. The best he can hope for is an open ear, a tender heart, and a willingness to follow. I believe Joshua had all these desires. He had seen the people endure in a season of tremendous challenge, relying upon the Lord. His hope was that in their season of rest they would do the same. Joshua first appeals to their intellect, asking if it seems evil to serve the Lord. He also recommends reflection upon their path of disobedience, repentance and ultimate, victorious restoration. In the end however, he chooses to use his own family as an example. Joshua was reaping the benefits of faithfulness, and was eager to continue. As the leader of Israel, he was desperate to see God's people make the same commitment. The challenge for us is to hear the heart's cry of our Pastors and teachers, following their example of service. Joshua was not perfect in obedience, and our leaders will have some of the same failings. Ultimately the people leading are not the issue; it is the God to which they point that matters.