

Joshua 1:1-9 After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, ²“Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. ³Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. ⁴From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. ⁵No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. ⁶Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. ⁸This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. ⁹Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Joshua 1:1-9 | A Year of Courage

Leslie Newbigin completes one of the great masterworks of 20th century theology, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, with a list of requirements for the church to successfully have a missionary encounter with modern western culture. Now when Newbigin was writing this about 33 years ago, he was writing about a very different modern western culture than we are in now, yet his critique of modernism was so insightful that his prescription for the church's response is just as helpful today in our postmodern framework. Here is his sixth piece of advice.

The sixth piece of advice I would suggest for a missionary encounter with our culture is simply the courage to hold and to proclaim a belief that cannot be proved to be true in terms of the axioms of our society. - Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 148.

Newbigin saw this challenge for the church in a world which in the public square subscribed to a fact driven rational materialism. There is no spiritual world, and therefore it would look absurd to argue from the existence of a spiritual world to a way things ought to be now. Therefore Newbigin understood that the Christian would need to face critiques from a culture which would demand “proof” in a very narrow sense with an understanding that the church cannot provide or satisfy that desire for proof. That was the challenge the church faced in a modernist framework.

Our challenges are similar in shape. We must courageously hold to beliefs which cannot be proved true in terms of the axioms of our society. But the axioms of our society are different in this postmodern framework. If Modernism was a quest for rational certainty in order to engage with the world, Post-modernism is the abandonment of the quest for certainty and a centering of the individuals immediate psychological experience as the measuring stick for right and wrong.

If the modernist said, “The truth exists just deal with it.” The postmodernist might say, “I exist just deal with me.”¹ This shift in thinking means the arguments against Christianity no longer have a rational objective shape. “Richard Dawkins destroys Christian with Facts and Data!” But instead have a subjective and individualist shape. Christians don’t have moral disagreements, they “deny the personhood.” “Institutionally oppress my existence.”

You can see the switch is one from a modern frame of merely being called a fool, and in that sense unintelligible. To a postmodern frame the Christian is not merely a fool, but oppressive and harmful. The claims of the christian have not changed, but the interpretive frame of our culture has. This is deeply important to recognize, otherwise we’ll be making equivocations all over the place. Equivocation is when you use the same word to mean two different things and the result is absurdity.

Therefore the Christian understands themselves to be seeking a liberation from the oppression of sin something which takes place in all of our hearts. And the non-Christian interprets this as a very act of oppression itself. Now I’ll say just because it is worth saying, just because someone calls you a bigot, doesn’t mean you aren’t. That is to say, just because you think of your moral claims as correct, doesn’t mean you aren’t simultaneously thinking of yourself as more equipped to stand before God. But likewise just because someone doesn’t call you a bigot, that doesn’t mean you’ve been a good friend.

You see the Christian is not operating in an objectivist framework in which we can merely present the facts of our worldview in an impersonal and obviously compelling way. Nor is Christianity subjective, in which it is good enough for Christianity to be true for me and not at the same time true for everyone I’ve ever met. Christianity claims that there is an objective truth which can only be known personally because the truth is a person. Therefore truth is objective in that it is its own thing and outside of ourselves, but it is revealed to us in our participation with it in the same that a person is revealed. This person is the gracious judge, under whose condemnation we all with absolute equality stand, and by whose sacrificial grace we might be set free from our self selected oppression.

This is not intuitive, but had to be revealed to us by our creator who is Jesus Christ the Lord. All this to say, being a Christian as it always has requires courage. But the courage that it requires now has a particular shape. One in which we will be called at best fools and at worst oppressors. Not necessarily because of disobedience but because of obedience. Therefore Christianity requires courage. So here is a look at one of the greatest exhortations towards courage in scripture. In it we see the need for courage, the hope of courage, and hopefully practically the means of courage.

¹The seeds of this postmodern centering of the human experience are of course present in the modernist quest for certainty. It was Descartes who placed the individual’s thinking at the center of existence when he said “I think therefore I am.” But the shape of the public square is no longer modernist.

1. The Need for Courage

Joshua 1:1-9 After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.

After 40 years of wandering around in the desert it is time for the People of God to enter the promised land. They stand on the cusp of a new world and there is no going back to the old world, because the text reiterates twice. Moses is dead. God has a way of burning the ships, and this is one of them. The way that the people of God had been held together was in large part by the person of Moses. But this centering reality for the nation is now gone. Instead they must move forward behind the assistant.

This must have been a deeply disorienting experience. The place where they had been they cannot go back to and the place where they are headed, no one has ever been. I want to draw an analog here to our cultural moment. The shift has taken place and whatever hope there was of a return, in fact the last attempts to use motivational phrases that involve the word "again" have fizzled and lost their energy almost completely. But where we are headed is difficult to explain. We haven't been there. But the church marches forward on the promises of God. "I have prepared a place for you," our Lord told us. And just as in the great commission when Jesus proclaimed that all authority was his so God ensures his servant Joshua.

Joshua 1:3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.

2. The Hope of Courage

Joshua 1:4-5 From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. ⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life.

God describes to his servant Joshua the very shape of the land which he had promised to give them. He ensures them their victory because he promises to them his presence. This is the hope of courage. We are not courageous so that we might feel courageous within ourselves we are courageous because God has promised the realization of his promised land. For Joshua this is a plot of ground on the eastern side of the Mediterranean, But this is only a type of the kingdom of heaven to come. Each man having his own vine and fig tree is great, but far better is no more death, or crying, or pain. The promised land the church marches towards now is incomprehensibly wonderful, and we should think about it often. Our courage is not for our own glory but the glory of God and in his glory we have our highest joy and the joy of all the families of the earth.

3. Means of Courage

Joshua 1:5 Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.

The first means of courage and most essential is trust in the presence of the Lord. God does not merely task us and then say we are up to it. But he promises his very presence in the midst of it. It is amazing the courage you can have when a close friend is present. You will defend morals you never would have stood for alone. You will be honest even to yourself when otherwise you would have lied. So we must trust in the presence of the Lord. He is with me.

Joshua 1:7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

Secondly we must hold fast to his word and not forsake it. This is a disposition which says of God, he is God and he is trustworthy. Oh how much we can know that his ways are for our good when he has already given his own son for us. What else would he possibly withhold.

Joshua 1:8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

With this trusting disposition in place we must practice meditation upon the word of God. We must craft our lives so that we live in his word. We know God like we know a person. And the way we know a person is we hear them and then we extend them trust. This is why untrustworthy people are so disorienting because they can't be known. But our God can be known. This means you must memorize scripture. You can't meditate on what you don't know.

Joshua 1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Lastly we must practice the presence of the Lord. How would I act in this situation if God were with me? Likewise we must as his body provide the presence of the Lord to one another in our encouragement strengthening and faithfulness to one another. You know the word comfort means to be strong with. This is our hope, that we would be strong with one another.

These next four weeks we will be covering these precise topics. You see the world is different but our means of being faithful in it is not very different.