

Wednesday, September 9, 2026

The Battle Begins

Joshua 1-2; Matthew 11:2-12

We have been following the story of God from the very beginning. We started with creation, when God made a world that was good and invited people to trust His story. Then Genesis 1–11 showed us what happens when people decide that they would rather write their own story instead. Over and over again, humanity refuses to trust God, and every time they do, chaos follows.

Then in Genesis 12, God calls Abraham. God begins building a people through him. We talked about Jacob and Joseph. We watched God rescue His people out of Egypt. And last week, we talked about Israel wandering in the wilderness.

Do you remember why God takes them into the wilderness? He is teaching them to **hear His voice**. “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” God is forming them into people of the ears—people who know how to listen when He speaks.

But now something changes. The wandering is over. Israel has spent forty years in the wilderness, and they are finally standing at the edge of the Promised Land. The Jordan River is in front of them. On the other side are cities they have never seen, people they have never fought, and challenges they have never faced. They are about to take their first steps into the land God promised them.

The battle is about to begin.

And that raises a really important question for us. We have already asked, *What kind of person does God use to build His people?* Today I want us to ask: **What kind of person does God use to take ground for His Kingdom?**

Because I hope you understand something: God still wants His Kingdom to advance. Not by Christians conquering cities with weapons. Not by

Christians forcing people to believe. Jesus shows us something completely different. God's Kingdom advances when people begin living the way of Jesus. When somebody who is lonely gets noticed. When somebody who is hurting gets loved. When somebody hears the gospel. When somebody forgives instead of getting revenge. When somebody chooses integrity when everybody else cheats. When somebody says, "Jesus, wherever You lead me, I will go."

That is Kingdom ground. And I believe God wants to use you to take some of it.

JOSHUA: COURAGE DOESN'T MEAN YOU AREN'T AFRAID

Moses has led Israel for decades, but now Moses is gone. And God chooses Joshua to take his place.

Just imagine that for a second. Imagine being told, "Hey, you are replacing Moses." You know—**Moses**. Ten plagues Moses. Parted-the-Red-Sea Moses. Talked-with-God-on-the-mountain Moses. And now everybody turns toward Joshua and says, "Okay. You're next."

I think I would have said, "Actually, I'm good."

But Joshua is chosen to lead the people into the Promised Land, and there is an interesting phrase that keeps showing up around Joshua: **Be strong and courageous**. God says it again and again. Moses says it. God says it. The people eventually say it. Joshua hears some form of that command over and over.

And you know what that tells me? **Joshua was scared**.

Why else would God keep telling him not to be afraid? We sometimes picture Bible heroes as these super-spiritual people who never struggled with anything. Joshua wakes up every morning: "Good morning, Lord. I am completely confident. I have zero doubts. I feel no fear whatsoever."

No! This guy is about to lead an entire nation into enemy territory. Of course he is scared.

And that is important, because some of you believe God could use you **if you weren't afraid**. "If I weren't nervous, I could talk to my friend about

Jesus.” “If I weren't scared of what people might think, I would stand up for that kid.” “If I had more confidence, I would join that ministry.” “If I wasn't worried about failing, maybe I would actually do what I think God is asking me to do.”

But listen: **Courage is not the absence of fear.** Courage is deciding that fear does not get to make your decisions.

Joshua can be scared and obedient at the same time. You can too.

So how does Joshua become strong and courageous? Listen to what God tells him in Joshua 1: “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... Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night...”

There's our answer. How is Joshua supposed to become courageous? By becoming deeply rooted in what God has said.

There is an interesting Hebrew word behind the word **meditate** there. The word is **hagah**. Everybody say, “Hagah.”

It doesn't really give us the picture that we normally have when we hear “meditate.” Usually we think: Sit somewhere quiet. Close your eyes. Breathe. Think peaceful thoughts.

But *hagah* can carry the idea of muttering, murmuring, even growling over something. Picture a lion with its food. It doesn't politely nibble the corner. It tears into it.

That's the picture.

God tells Joshua: **Get into My words. Keep them in your mouth. Think about them. Talk about them. Wrestle with them. Tear into them. Let My words get down inside of you.**

Because Joshua is going somewhere that will scare him. And when fear hits, he is going to need something stronger than his feelings.

That is true for you too. You are going to have moments when following Jesus is hard. You are going to walk into classrooms where nobody else

seems to believe what you believe. You're going to sit in locker rooms and lunchrooms and group chats where following Jesus may cost you something. You're going to have moments when doing the right thing makes you look weird.

And in those moments, you cannot build your life on, “Well, I kind of feel like God is probably with me.” You need something deeper. You need His voice inside of you.

That's why we read Scripture. Not because God gives bonus points for finishing a Bible reading plan. We get Scripture inside of us because someday we are going to need courage. And courage grows when we know the voice of the One who is leading us.

RAHAB: GOD DOESN'T ONLY USE PERFECT PEOPLE

Then we get to Joshua chapter 2. Joshua sends two spies into Jericho to scout out the city.

Which is kind of funny when you already know how Jericho falls. Imagine the spies coming back. “What did you discover?” “Well, Joshua, we found several weaknesses in the western wall, and we think if we position the army—” Joshua says, “Actually, we're going to walk around it and blow trumpets.” “Oh. Glad we risked our lives.”

But the spies enter Jericho, and they end up staying in the house of a woman named Rahab. Rahab is a prostitute.

And if you know the rest of the Bible, you know that Rahab becomes one of the great examples of faith. Think about that. If we were choosing the person God was going to use in Jericho, I'm not sure Rahab would make our list. We would probably look for somebody with a cleaner reputation. Somebody respectable. Somebody who had made better decisions.

God says, “I'll use Rahab.”

And I think some students need to hear that. Because there is this lie that creeps into Christianity sometimes: **“Once I get my life cleaned up, then God can use me.”**

No.

Jesus does not say, “Fix yourself, and then come follow Me.” He says, “Come follow Me.” And He begins changing us as we follow Him.

Rahab hears what Israel's God has done. She believes that He is the true God. She hides the spies and tells them essentially, “Everybody here has heard what your God has done. We know He has given you this land.” She asks them to spare her family when Israel comes into the city.

The spies tell her to hang a scarlet cord from the window. When Israel enters Jericho, everybody inside Rahab's house will be protected. And that is exactly what happens.

But Rahab's story does not end there. Rahab eventually becomes part of Israel. Later, when Matthew gives us the genealogy of Jesus, guess whose name appears? **Rahab.**

She's part of Jesus' family line. Rahab becomes the mother of Boaz. Boaz marries Ruth. Their family eventually leads to David. And generations later, to Jesus.

Do you see what God is showing us? The world might have looked at Rahab and said, “Her?” God said, “Yes. Her.”

And maybe you have looked at yourself and thought the same thing. “God couldn't really use me.” “You don't know what I've done.” “You don't know what I've watched.” “You don't know the choices I've made.” “You don't know how badly I've messed up.”

You're right. I don't. But God does.

And He knew your story when He invited you to follow Him.

Does that mean sin doesn't matter? Of course not. Jesus calls us away from sin. He transforms us. He teaches us holiness. But your past is not more powerful than God's grace.

Your mistakes do not have more authority over your future than Jesus does.

God uses scared people. God uses imperfect people. God uses people other people would overlook.

Which means God can use people like us.

SO WHAT KIND OF PERSON DOES GOD USE?

Now we know what God doesn't require. He doesn't require you to be fearless. Joshua was afraid. He doesn't require you to have a perfect past. Rahab certainly didn't.

So what kind of person is God looking for? Someone willing to move when He opens the way.

And Jesus gives us an amazing picture of this in Matthew 11.

John the Baptist is in prison. John sends some of his disciples to Jesus with a question: "Are You the One who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Now remember who John is. This is the guy who pointed at Jesus and said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" John knows who Jesus is.

So his question seems to carry something deeper. It's almost like John is saying, "Jesus... are we going to get this Kingdom moving?"

John is sitting in prison. He expected Messiah to bring God's Kingdom. And he's wondering what is happening.

Jesus sends John's disciples back with a message. He talks about the blind seeing, the lame walking, people being healed, and good news being proclaimed. Jesus is pulling language from the Old Testament prophets.

But there is something really interesting about the answer. In those prophetic passages, one of the expectations connected with God's rescue was freedom for captives.

Where is John? **Prison.**

And Jesus doesn't mention that part.

In other words, there seems to be a difficult message for John: "John, the Kingdom is coming. But it isn't coming exactly the way you expected. And you are not getting out of that prison."

Then Jesus says, “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of Me.”

That's heavy.

Because sometimes following Jesus means trusting Him even when the story doesn't go the way you expected.

Then, just a few verses later, Jesus says something strange. He talks about the Kingdom of Heaven forcefully—or violently—advancing.

That sounds weird coming from Jesus. Because Jesus says: Love your enemies. Bless those who persecute you. Turn the other cheek. Blessed are the meek.

So what is going on?

Here's where the language gets really interesting. The Greek word in Matthew connects us back to an Old Testament picture found in Micah.

Micah describes God's people like sheep packed into a pen.

Have you ever seen cows or sheep after they have been pinned up for a long time? Then somebody opens the gate. What happens?

They don't calmly walk out single file. They burst out. They run. They jump. They kick. They explode into the open field.

And Micah describes someone **breaking open the way** before them. The gate is opened. The King goes before them. And God's people rush through.

That is a beautiful picture of what Jesus has done.

Sin had us trapped. Death had us trapped. Shame had us trapped.

Jesus blows the gate open.

And then He says, **Come on. Follow Me out.**

The Kingdom advances as God's people move through the opening Jesus has made. Not through violence against people, but through a Kingdom

that breaks into darkness with light. Hatred meets love. Shame meets grace. Loneliness meets community. Greed meets generosity. Lies meet truth. Death meets resurrection.

And everywhere Jesus' people actually live like Jesus, the Kingdom starts breaking through.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AMAZING. YOU HAVE TO BE AVAILABLE.

So let's bring all of this together. What kind of person does God use to take Kingdom ground?

Apparently, scared people like Joshua. Messy people like Rahab. People who sometimes don't understand God's plan, like John the Baptist.

In other words: **People like us.**

You don't have to become some super-Christian before God can use you. You don't need to know every answer. You don't need to have a perfect testimony. You don't need to suddenly become the most outgoing person in your school.

You need to listen to God's voice and be willing to move when He tells you to move.

Maybe taking Kingdom ground this week looks like sitting beside somebody everybody ignores. Maybe it means apologizing. Maybe it means forgiving somebody. Maybe it means refusing to laugh at something everybody else thinks is funny because it tears somebody down. Maybe God has been pushing you to invite somebody to youth. Maybe you need to actually tell a friend why Jesus matters to you. Maybe taking ground means deleting something that keeps pulling you away from God. Maybe it means finally asking somebody for help with something you're hiding. Maybe it means opening your Bible and actually beginning to *hagah*—to wrestle with God's words until they start shaping the way you think.

Whatever it is, don't wait until you're fearless. Joshua wasn't. Don't wait until you're perfect. Rahab wasn't. And don't wait until you understand everything God is doing. John didn't.

Just be willing to move.

Because Jesus has already opened the gate. The question is whether we are willing to run through it.

THE BATTLE BEGINS

Israel is standing at the edge of the Promised Land. For forty years, they wandered. For forty years, God taught them to listen.

But now the lesson changes.

Now it's time to move.

And I think that's where some of us are. Maybe you've been hearing about Jesus for years. You've been coming to church. You've been learning the stories. You've been memorizing verses. You've been sitting in youth group.

That's good.

But eventually, what you hear has to become how you live. Eventually, the gate opens and God says: **Go.**

Be strong and courageous. Stay rooted in My Word. Don't let your past disqualify you. Don't let fear control you. Follow your King. And take some ground.

Because the battle has begun.

And the Kingdom of God is still advancing.

Let's pray.

Jesus, thank You that You don't only use fearless people. Thank You that You don't only use people with perfect stories. Thank You that throughout Scripture, You use ordinary, scared, imperfect people who are willing to trust You.

Teach us to hear Your voice. Help us get Your Word deep inside of us so that when fear comes, we know what is true. And when You open the way in front of us, give us the courage to move.

Show us where Your Kingdom needs to break into our schools, our teams, our families, and our friendships. And then use us to bring Your love, Your truth, Your grace, and Your good news there.

Help us be strong and courageous—not because we are strong, but because You are with us.

Amen.