



## **Joshua 10:1-28 - Sun Stand Still**

**August 15, 2021**

**Kevin Maloney**

We are going to Joshua 10 today.

At the beginning of this book, God told the young leader Joshua, **“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” (Joshua 1:9).**

You know you’re in for a difficult time when the Lord tells you, “You’re going to need courage for this.” That’s kind of like the doctor saying, “This is going to hurt.”

Joshua would be blessed by God and used by God to lead the cantankerous Israelites into the land of promise, but they would face internal and external threats along the way. He would face the external threats of Canaanites not going down without a fight, using over warfare and subtle deception to oppose God and his work. And soon they’d face some of the internal threats as the Jews would be tempted to become Canaanites and follow their ways and practices. So Joshua would need a double dose of courage to lead into all of this.

So Joshua and the people of Israel are facing one battle after another, one wicked king after another is coming at them, even though they took Jericho, a powerful city, and subdued Gibeon, another powerful city, the battles are actually escalating - it isn’t getting easier. (It’s like a video game where you conquer one level and everything is a little faster and harder in the next level.) They beat one city and one king, and then a bunch of kings unite against them and oppose them.

At this point, Joshua is probably thinking, “This is why God told me I would need courage. This is why He warned me not to get discouraged. Because it just keeps coming.”

Joshua doesn't know when this will end. They didn't have spy satellites so they could know when they were wiping out the last of the enemy's resources, nobody had a scientific model that projected the end of fighting within 18 months. It was a daily fight, enemies were multiplying, Israel is winning but they are still losing loved ones in every battle. It was wearying, and news of more enemies uniting and more battles to come would wear them out.

And so often the Christian life is like that. One challenge only prepares us for the next bigger challenge. We resist temptation and a greater one comes. We get a child through tough circumstances and tougher ones come. We get past a time of despair only to start another one again. And we're tempted to be worn out and weary and fearful for the future.

Now the contemporary church tries to give an answer for all of this by telling us, “Your breakthrough is right around the corner.” “You are strong enough for this. You are up to the challenge. With the right kind of prayers, you will radically change your circumstances.” Which, in the moment, is so nice to hear. Who doesn't want to believe a breakthrough is right around the corner? Who doesn't want to be told that we're stronger than we think? It's an uplifting message, it gives hope.

But the problem is that, though breakthroughs sometimes come, life usually stays hard. God answers prayers often and certainly intervenes to change circumstances sometimes, we should call out to Him and ask Him to answer. But we have no guarantee that He will answer with the answer we want, or in the timeframe we want. While God may answer those prayers and provide a breakthrough right around the corner, there's no way of knowing whether that's His will.

And when the breakthrough doesn't prove to be right around the corner, this can lead to all kinds of problems:

(1) Doubt - God guaranteed a breakthrough and it hasn't come, so maybe He's not real.

(2) Bitterness - God didn't do what "he promised" and I'm exhausted here.

(3) False guilt - what's wrong with me? Christians can claim these guaranteed breakthroughs and I claimed mine with lots of faith, and I'm still here: still tempted, still in the nightmare job, still with family problems, still with my health failing. Perhaps I'm not a Christian.

So the message that's uplifting in the moment ("your breakthrough is here") can lead to deep discouragement over a long haul. The promises at church can start to ring hollow because we've heard this happy clappy talk before and the promises didn't pan out.

I saw someone tweet her commentary on church this summer, and she wrote, *"Imagine going to church service this morning and hearing a guy in skinny jeans tell you for the hundredth time that your victory is right around the corner..."*<sup>1</sup>

So I can't make that promise to you. (I can promise you I'll never wear skinny jeans.) But though I can promise that Jesus will finally conquer whatever you're facing and your eternity as a Christian is secure, I can't promise that a breakthrough or victory is right around the corner.

But I don't have a smaller promise than that to give you. There's something far better than that that's true, something far more faith-sustaining and stabilizing and endurance-imparting than that.

God told Joshua not to be afraid or discouraged, not because that battle was almost over, but because the "Lord your God is with you." He didn't say, "Be strong and courageous, your breakthrough is here." He said, "Be strong and courageous, I'm here."

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<sup>1</sup> @scottstrots

And if God is greater than everything, that means He is greater than any answer to prayer. He's greater than any breakthrough. He's greater than any win, any victory, any peace you might achieve in this life.

And knowing Him, knowing Who He is, knowing what He is like, and what He does for His people is what we need far more than a change in circumstances, a breakthrough, or an end to the battles.

So let's look at this passage, Joshua 10.

**Joshua 10:1 As soon as Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard how Joshua had captured Ai and had devoted it to destruction, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, <sup>2</sup> he feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were warriors.**

So the king of Jerusalem hears how Joshua and his army were conquering in the promised land. (At this time, Jerusalem is not under the control of Israel, it is a pagan city, ruled by Adoni-zedek, whose name means something like Lord of Righteousness, a lofty title for this guy who's kind of a jerk.)

And he hears about how the Gibeonites deceived Joshua to make peace with the Israelites, which in the end required the Gibeonites to become servants of Israel. And this was a big deal, because Gibeon was one of the "royal cities" or capital cities of that region.

So he assumes that Jerusalem will fall too, and now, in fear, he scrambles together an alliance.<sup>2</sup> And they decide to attack Gibeon because now Gibeon was an ally of Israel. They couldn't take out Israel, but they could take out their new ally and stop the encroachment of Israel, maybe.

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<sup>2</sup> "Gibeon was not only a formidable frontier town but also the capital of that section, and such a territory yielding so tamely to Israel much alarmed the king of Jerusalem. Not only had he lost what he probably counted upon as being a powerful ally, but he feared that other cities would follow suit, so that he now began to tremble for his own skin." - Pink

**<sup>3</sup> So Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, <sup>4</sup> Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon. For it has made peace with Joshua and with the people of Israel.” <sup>5</sup> Then the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered their forces and went up with all their armies and encamped against Gibeon and made war against it. <sup>6</sup> And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, “Do not relax your hand from your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country are gathered against us.” <sup>7</sup> So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor.**

So now Joshua is back in the battle. This time, it's not just one king, but five that He's fighting. The farther the kingdom of God extends and the more it accomplishes, the greater the opposition. Which was true in the life of Jesus (the opposition only grew stronger until His final battle), and is often true in our Christian lives: the more ground God takes, the stronger the opposition.<sup>3</sup>

### **God Has Promised Ongoing Difficulties**

So it might be good to adjust expectations, so that we don't think we are one victory away from a problem-free life. Our problems often spawn variants and get more complex. Conquering one temptation doesn't mean we will be living temptation free, there will be more. Fixing one relational problem probably won't mean we're done with relational problems. Advancing the kingdom of God in one category won't mean the advancing and fighting is done.

So we probably all need to drop the myth of “one more mountain” that we believe, the myth that if we just take care of this one major problem we will be problem free. Finishing high school, graduating college, getting married, getting the career, having a kid, getting a kid out of diapers, getting past the toddler phase, or the

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<sup>3</sup> A. W. Pink in "Gleanings in Joshua", writes, "Instead of having to meet the force of a single king, the massed armies of five of them had now to be defeated. The same thing appears in the history of our Savior: the farther His gracious ministry proceeded, the greater and fiercer the opposition met with. Sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master."

teenager phase, or getting the kids graduated, or retiring - none of these wins will mean there are no more battles to fight.

Conquering a temptation or addiction may look like the only battle on the horizon because it is so daunting, but once it goes down you see that there are more battles to fight. Jesus said:

**John 16:33 “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”**

Notice, again, that Jesus says there will be trouble. But the promise, he says, is Him. It isn't an end to trouble in this world - that's certainly coming in the new world we're all headed for. But here, the troubles will continue.

Because sometimes, our solutions can have unintended consequences. Remember, Joshua made a treaty with the Gibeonites because he thought it would mean more peace, less war. But now, because of that treaty, he has to defend the Gibeonites, and he has more war, against 5 kings. Yesterday's solutions are today's problems for him.

Each win brings more battles, each season brings new challenges, each change brings new temptations. There won't be a season of this life without many dangers, toils, and snares.

But look at Joshua here. He might be tempted here to just dump the Gibeonites. He is only in this war because they tricked him and he made a commitment to them based on their false pretenses. But still he fights. And not only is that an example to us, but Joshua is being like Jesus here, devoted to those that He saved, continuing to fight for those He saved. They didn't deserve it, it cost him a great deal, but He had made a covenant and would keep His word.

Joshua was a little-S savior here. And like Jesus, when he saves, he means it. When he saves, he really saves. He fights for those who are unworthy. He stays in the battle on their behalf. He finishes what he starts, he keeps his word.

In this world of trouble, there's a savior fighting away on behalf of those he has saved.

**Joshua 10:8 And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you." <sup>9</sup> So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal.**

### **God Has Promised an Ultimate Victory Over His Enemies**

Notice here that God guarantees the victory. There will be an ultimate win.

But Joshua's response is not to put his feet up and let the guaranteed victory come to him. He marches all night in pursuit of it. The win that God guarantees doesn't produce inaction or laziness in Joshua, but fearlessness.<sup>4</sup>

In response to God's sure promise that the battle will be won, Joshua fights.

While a breakthrough right around the corner is never guaranteed for us, the final victory of Jesus over all of his enemies is guaranteed:

**1 Corinthians 15:24-26 "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.**

Jesus is reigning now, and there's coming a day at his return when His reign is complete and all of his enemies: satan, death, sin, unbelief, sickness, sorrow - they will all be defeated and the final enemy to be defeated will be death itself.

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<sup>4</sup> Calvin: "It is moreover worthy of notice that Joshua did not abuse the divine promise by making it an excuse for sluggishness, but felt the more vehemently inflamed after he was assured of a happy issue. Many, while they ostentatiously express their faith, become lazy and slothful from perverse security. Joshua hears that victory is in his hand, and that he may gain it, runs swiftly to battle. For he knew that the happy issue was revealed, not for the purpose of slackening his pace or making him more remiss, but of making him exert himself with greater zeal. Hence it was that he took the enemy by surprise."

That's a guarantee - that's what Jesus is up to right now, subduing His enemies. And He will win this battle completely. It is guaranteed.

One day our sin will be defeated, evil will be defeated, unbelief will be defeated. And our response is not to just wait till then, but to act: to fight our sin and temptation, to take on evil, to preach the Gospel to defeat unbelief. The battle will be won, so we fight it.

So God has promised us continued troubles and ongoing difficulties so we can adjust expectations, but has also promised an ultimate triumph over his enemies, so we keep fighting in hope, with the Lord with us:

**Joshua 9:10-15 “And the LORD threw them into a panic before Israel, who struck them with a great blow at Gibeon and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. <sup>11</sup> And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword.**

**<sup>12</sup> At that time Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, “Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.”**

**<sup>13</sup> And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies.**

**Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. <sup>14</sup> There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD heeded the voice of a man, for the LORD fought for Israel.**

**<sup>15</sup> So Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.**

There's a lot here. Real quick on the book of Jashar. This is a book that is cited here and in 2 Samuel.<sup>5</sup> It seems to be a book we don't have anymore. Which doesn't mean we are missing part of the Bible. The Bible refers to other,

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Samuel 1:19-27

non-inspired sources at times (also the book of Enoch, and an apocryphal book is referred to in the New Testament, Paul quoted secular authors in Acts 17 and Titus 1, for example.) The inspired word of God was written by real people who had read other things and refers to those other works at times. That doesn't mean everything in those books was true or good, but they cited other authors so people could cross-check some facts<sup>6</sup> and to link to history written in other places for further study.

Though every word in the Bible is inspired and put there by God, God uses means, and the biblical authors often did interviews, recorded oral history, referenced other works, and even included elements of their personality in the text. But the final product was a perfect, God-inspired book written to people by people.

But obviously, more significant than the book of Jashar here are two big miracles that happen to ensure the victory of the Israelites. Huge hailstorms fall from the sky and take out more enemy soldiers than the Israelite soldiers did. And secondly, Joshua prays and the sun stands still to keep the battlefield lit up through the night so the Israelites could win the battle.

Which raises a question:

### **Did this really happen?**

I'm no scientist, but it seems that the sun standing still would have some consequences. If the earth stopped spinning for a few hours, it seems that would pretty much destroy the world. The surface of the earth at the equator is always moving at around 1000 miles per hour. And we don't feel it because it isn't accelerating or decelerating. So it seems that jamming on the breaks so that something moving at 1000 miles per hour stops dead would create some issues. People weren't wearing seatbelts, and grinding the globe to a halt would send them flying.

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<sup>6</sup> Like the Apostles calling on the witness of the many who saw Jesus risen from the dead, so Joshua mentions an extra text as a backup primary source for this event. It's recorded elsewhere.

So there have been a number of ways scholars have handled that. Some have said this was just a metaphor for something. Some have said that God made it seem like the sun stood still. Some have claimed this is describing a solar eclipse.

But all of those explanations seem like a stretch. This story talks about this event like it was actual history. And an eclipse does the opposite of what the sun does in this story.

So I think the best explanation is that this was a miracle of God, and all of the other things that God would have to hold together on earth to be able to do this were also completely handled by God. For God to stop the earth from spinning would have meant that he also would have had to supernaturally keep every atom on earth from doing what it would normally do if the globe stopped spinning.

God was well aware of all of the geological consequences of doing what He did here, and He held all things together anyways to make it happen.

And it's remarkable that He can do this. We notice it, and might even doubt it, when He does it in an exceptional way through a miracle. But He is always having to hold all things together for the world to go on as it does on any normal day.

*"We should always endeavor to wonder at the permanent thing, not at the mere exception. We should be startled by the sun, and not by the eclipse. We should wonder less at the earthquake, and wonder more at the earth."* - Chesterton:

God is a God who holds all things together. While it is amazing that God would hold every atom to keep everything from falling apart when the world stopped spinning, it is just as amazing that He is already doing that all the time.

And this is why it's better news that He's with us than news of a breakthrough would be. The God who is with us is the God who holds all things together:

## **God Holds All Things Together**

**Hebrews 3:13 “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power”**

**Colossians 1:16-17 “16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”**

The God who is with us is the God who is always holding everything together.

When we say God is with us, we aren't saying that nice feelings about God are with us. We are saying that GOD is with us.

We believe that He is

## **God Is Omnipotent - All Powerful**

**Psalm 115:3 - 3 Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.**

**Genesis 18:14 “Is anything too hard for the LORD?”**

God holds everything together, and He does so effortlessly. He doesn't spend his energy in any way that He has to replenish it. When He rests, it is never because He's tired.

God isn't overwhelmed. God isn't weak. And so when we are weak and overwhelmed in our trials, it's good news that God who is omnipotent is with us.

And when we are confused and don't understand life or these trials, we don't see the end game, we don't know how we ever get out of this, we have a God who is with us who is not only omnipotent, all powerful, but also omniscient, all-knowing:

## **God is Omniscient - All Knowing**

***Psalm 139:1-2 O LORD, you have searched me and known me! 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.***

God knows everything, past, present and future.

But He knows things in a different way than we do. We know some things well, some things less well, we kind-of remember some things, we forget things, we believe lies and mix truth with error in our comprehension.

With God, everything is completely visible to Him and fully known by Him at all times, with no forgetfulness, no fogginess, no strain to know how things work or how things will go. Everything is completely known by God, actual and potential. He knows everything immediately, doesn't have to think his way to a conclusion, He always knows all of the right conclusions.

And it is that God that is with us and guiding our lives, directing our paths.

God is omnipotent, omniscient, and He's always there, everywhere, He's omnipresent:

## **God is Omnipresent - Filling the Universe in All of Its Parts**

***Psalm 139:7-12 "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! 9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," 12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.***

God is always there. This doesn't mean part of God is present everywhere, but all of God is present everywhere. Holding all things together by the word of His power. He's not an absentee landlord to His creation, but fully present with His

creation always.

The God that we worship is not just a God who set natural processes into place, put some batteries in the world, and then left it to run on it's own. The God of the Bible is a God who is over, through, in all things, and still very active in the world.

### **God is a God of Providence**

**This is the idea called providence** - that God preserves, cares for, and governs his world so that it fulfills its intended purposes. He is intimately involved with creation, even if we don't sense him in our spirits, even if He feels far. If He were really far, everything would fall apart. He's fully here, everywhere, all the time.

Scripture doesn't picture a world governed just by natural laws and consequences of behaviors, but a world that is intimately cared for and governed by God.

So here God makes the sun stand still in the sky, and miraculously also does everything you would need to do so that not everything disintegrates. Which is not too hard for God, who is constantly keeping everything from disintegrating anyways. But He does it in a unique way here in Joshua 10.

And what's even stranger about this is that God does all of this for this group of down and out nomads who've been roaming in the woods for 40 years after being freed from slavery.

He does this for Israel, one nation among all of the nations, not a particularly unique nation (outside of His calling on them,) not a group of really exceptionally bright or good-spirited people. A group of grumpy, confused, sinful people to the east of the Mediterranean.

He does this for little old Israel.

And this also says something important about how God thinks about His people.

### **God Has An Intense, Active Love For All of His People**

**Deuteronomy 32:8-10** “8 When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. 9 But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. 10 "He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.”

God came to this people in the howling waste of the wilderness, and out of sheer grace He set his affections on them, and decided to keep them and protect them like we protect our eyeballs.

Why them? I don't know. Why this kind of unique love and affection for this people? God's ways are past finding out.

But Joshua 10:14 remarks:

**Joshua 10:14** “the LORD fought for Israel.”

Crazy, I know. But He did. God chose a people to set his love and affection on, a people to care for even beyond the significant care He already gives to all people in all places.

And the good news in Romans 16 is that all who believe in Christ by faith are grafted into this people. Christ came, and those who didn't believe in Him were branches that were cut off of that tree, and all who would believe from all nations are attached to that tree.

So if we believe in Christ, the kind of love and care God showed to Israel is the kind of love and care God shows toward us.

The way God would hold every atom in place so that he could make the sun stand still and accomplish His purposes for Israel, and who can do so effortlessly, is the God who is with us. He is directing all things, all of history, every atom, for the ultimate and final good of His people, His church.

### **We Can Expect That God Will Keep Us Through Every Trial**

So Christian, I don't know how God will answer your prayers. I don't know if your breakthrough is right around the corner. I don't know how much longer the fighting will last. And I don't want to offer any false promise.

But here's a much better promise: the God who holds all things together loves us and is with us and has promised to work all things together for our ultimate and final good, and if it takes Him holding every atom in the universe at once to make it happen, no sweat at all for Him.

### **And If We Doubt, Look at the Cross**

Where God directed all of history toward our redemption. He used all of the things that cause us so much difficulty to lead to our greatest good. He took all of the things that cause us our greatest difficulties to lead to our greatest good.

So if we are fearful because of corrupt government, look to the cross where God used the shadiness of corrupt government to ensure that Jesus would go to the cross for our redemption.

If our trials are with difficult people, God used arrogant and hurtful religious people to lead to that when Jesus would purchase our forgiveness.

If we are fearful because of the devil, God used the schemes of the devil to lead to the crucifixion of the son of God which caused the devil's ultimate defeat.

God turned human pride, weak disciples, betrayal, and confusion all toward our good.

God took the worst moment in history, the moment that the Son of God was crucified, died, and was buried, into the greatest triumph, the greatest answer to prayers, the greatest and most long-lasting breakthrough. He died, looking like he was defeated by the battle and that evil had finally won, and He rose, defeating Satan, sin, and death.

He turned the worst moment into His greatest victory. And our confidence is not that the trials will end soon in this life, but that God, who has that much power, and that much love, has set His affections on us, and is completely with us, with perfect knowledge of the situation, always there everywhere we go.

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Sermon by Kevin Maloney, with contributions by Abbey Sitterley. Prayer of confession used after this sermon was adapted from pages 232-233 of the prayer book entitled Streams of Mercy by Barbara Duguid.  
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**Sermon Discussion Questions:**

- 1) How do we live differently if we trust in God's promises and who God is, as opposed to expecting immediate breakthroughs?
- 2) How are the attributes of God life-changing? How are they a comfort?
- 3) Does God ever want us sick? Does God ever want us to go through trials? What is our hope while we do?
- 4) Can we pray for the sun to stand still and expect it to happen like it did for Joshua? Why or why not?
- 5) How does a belief in God's providence change how we live?