

In August of 1969, 400,000 people camped out on Max Yasgur's farm in N.Y. for a 3-day music festival that was billed as an "Aquarian Exposition." It was the dawning of the age of Aquarius. A time of "harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding." Woodstock has been described as a pivotal moment in American history, not only for the music industry but the event came to symbolize the countercultural hippie revolution. A "hippie" was the 60's version of a millennial. The anthem that emerged from Woodstock was a song written by Joni Mitchell and made famous by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. The chorus goes, "We are stardust, we are golden, we are billion-year-old carbon. And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden." The message was that if you could just get thousands of people together to love each other, listen to rock music and get high, then you would rediscover the Garden of Eden.

Everyone is looking for a way back to the Garden. Within the human soul there is a longing for a place of peace and rest, where everything is the way it's supposed to be. We know it exists but each day reminds us it's not here. So all of life is a journey from here to there. How do we get "there?" And what are the obstacles before us? What will we discover when we get "there?" What are the chances that we will make it?

Over the next ten weeks I hope to answer questions like these as we study the book of Joshua. All history is His story. The lessons contained in the book of Joshua are not merely ancient stories about a foreign culture with no relevance to our own. The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that "these things happened as examples to us." Examples of how God gets His people from "here" to "there," to the place where we will be fully alive, living in perfect union with Him and with one another and living out our God-given purpose. We were there once. At least our ancestors, Adam and Eve were. That perfect place was wrecked by sin and ever since then we have been following the clues left to us in the scriptures to get back again.

But here's the good news, we don't have to wait for pie in the sky in the sweet by and by when we die to get there. The NT confirms that we can take possession of our inheritance right now. So let's get started. The essence of what it means to "live out our God-given purpose in Christ" is demonstrated by the three choices set before Joshua and the people of Israel. They had to: Cross the river. Confront the enemy. Claim their inheritance.

I. Crossing the river requires leadership. God commissioned Joshua to lead His people into the Promised Land. The book of Joshua begins with a clear command, 1:1-3. For more than four decades Joshua was being prepared to fulfill His God-given purpose. When the people of Israel came out of Egypt and were attacked by the Amalekites, Moses sent Joshua into battle and the Israelites prevailed. They continued on until they got within a couple day's journey from the Promised Land.

Moses then sent 12 spies into the land on a reconnaissance mission. 10 of the 12 spies weren't exactly eager to cross the river: "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are."³² So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height."³³ And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." Nu. 13:31-33. Notice the effect this had on the people.

"Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. ² And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! ³ Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" ⁴ And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." Nu. 14:1-4.

Joshua, along with Caleb, were the two spies in the minority. "Let's go. Let's go get what God promised us." The majority of the people suffered from an ancient disease - the "grasshopper complex." You can hear it still today, even among Christians. "The country has gone to the dogs. The church is dying. We are outnumbered by atheists and secularists and activists and terrorists. Our views are no longer welcome in the public square. The sky is falling." With that kind of attitude, we are destined to die in the desert. Have you ever wondered why the people wandered in the wilderness for 40 years? Because 40 years represents one generation. God knew that it would take a few thousand funerals to raise up a whole new generation of leaders who would have the courage to follow Joshua into the Promised Land. For those who refused to cross the river, the wilderness wandering was not a delay, it was a death sentence.

II. Confront the enemy. You won't get from "here" to "there" without resistance. Forty years earlier, the spies who gave a bad report were not wrong. "The people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified *and* very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there." Nu. 13:28. Israel has always had her enemies but those visible impediments are no match for the invisible ones. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, "but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." These forces traffic in fear.

One of the reasons we get stuck in life is because we fear the future. Our uncertainty causes us to retreat to the past. The people of Israel wanted to go back to Egypt. Why? Because as bad as the past was it was preferable to an uncertain future. Why did God turn Lot's wife into a pillar of salt? Because she looked back on the way out of Sodom. Why? Because she chose a certain past over an uncertain future. When your memories of the past are stronger than your vision for the future, the end is near.

III. Claim your inheritance. The word "land" is found 87 times in the book of Joshua. It was to be Israel's place of rest, her inheritance and the place where God dwells among His people. Why is this such a big deal? God chose the land of Israel to be the stage upon which the great drama of redemption would unfold.

Gen. 3:15 - God promised a Savior.

Gen. 12 - The Savior would be a descendant of Abraham.

Gen. 49:10 - the Savior will come from the tribe of Judah.

2 Sam. 7 - the Savior will be from the family of David.

Is. 7 - The Savior will be born of a virgin.

Micah 5:2 - The Savior will be born in Bethlehem. The prophets zeroed in on the identity of this Jewish man who would be a light to the Gentiles and the Savior of the world.

Our inheritance is not land but "every spiritual blessing in Christ." Eph. 1:3.

So let's summarize this first message with some action steps:

1. Follow the leader. Joshua is dead but there is another Joshua in the Bible - Jesus. He is very much alive. And His invitation to all of us is "Follow me." If you refuse to follow Jesus then life is a journey without a destination. Like the people who came out of Egypt you will wander through life and die in the wilderness. Cross the river.

If you're over 40 stop complaining and get moving. Lead the way across the river to the place God has for you. If you're stuck, you won't inspire anyone to go anywhere. And as for those under 40, don't buy the stereotypes about Millennials that are out there. "Lazy, narcissistic, selfie-lovers with their heads in their phones all the time." (photo) Don't you wish it was like the good old days when people really interacted with each other in a personal way (old photo).

2. Be strong and courageous. Four times in this chapter we read, "Be strong and of good courage." (vv. 6-7, 9, 18). We will never get from here to there without courage. Courage comes from the promise of God's presence. Joshua was a courageous 80-year-old leader because he believed the promise that God would be with him...vv. 5-11. The NT promise is that Immanuel would come. What does Immanuel mean, "God with us." The final words of Jesus recorded in Matthew's gospel are, "Lo, I am with you always..."

Courage comes when we are confident in our calling. Joshua knew what to do. Every detail of his life had prepared him for this assignment. He had been mentored by Moses. Those who confidently live out their God-given purpose impart courage to those around them.

"That first morning I was blown away by the entire MDA experience; everyone I came in contact with was so "all over it", totally focused on me and my condition with the unified goal of curing me. At one point when there was a lull, I asked my primary doctor, who is head of the Proton Beam Therapy department, why is he doing this? He is a State of Texas employee and could be making multiples more in private practice. He looked at me and said 'because this is what I want to do with my life; my passion is to eradicate cancer.' Of course, since I'm a big baby, that made me cry and I looked back at Becky and said through tears, 'I'm in...I'm all in!' We just felt so good about our overall experience. At MDA, every part of my treatment is part of an overall team effort and each individual communicates constantly with the other team members on every step of the way that they lay their hands on." Email from Scott Palmer - 2/4/17

Some of you crossed the river last Sunday at Group Connect. If you didn't, you still can...There is no doubt that the opposition will come. There will be all sorts of reasons not to continue on. Don't give in.

3. Trust the promises of God. You can't trust His promises if you don't know what they are. Memorize Joshua 1:8. Do not let His word depart out of your mouth. Every promise God makes He fulfills. Follow Him and one day we will be able to say what Joshua said at the end of his life:

"And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed." Josh. 23:14