



Joshua 1:1-18 Courageous Obedience

This morning we begin a new book together – the book of Joshua, from the Old Testament. It's the sixth book in the Bible, so you'll find it up front.

Joshua is 80 years old when he becomes the leader of the nation of Israel, a position he assumes after the death of Moses who led the people out of Egypt when he was 80. So let me make a point about that: no offense, but God uses old people. If you're sitting in here, and you're under the age of 80 – don't assume you're going to coast into retirement.

God used Abraham and Sarah, and they weren't whipper-snappers when they started having kids, were they? In the New Testament, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, complained that he and his wife Elizabeth were too old to be having kids. Luke 2 tells us about Anna, a woman who was 84 years old and never left the Temple because she always busy serving God. Titus 2 tells the older women to be investing into the younger women. Paul refers to himself as "the aged" (Phm 9). So, who says you're supposed to be living for the day when you've got nothing more than a rocking chair and knitting needles or a fishing rod?

Hilary Clinton is 68, Donald Trump is 69 and Bernie Sanders is 74 years old. And yet, they want to spend their seventies doing the hardest job in this country. Why wouldn't *you* want to spend your fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties, whatever you've got advancing the eternal kingdom of God?

You see, here's the thing: God could have sent an angel to lead the people into the promised land – a fiery, supernatural warrior charging into the hills with all the people following him. It would make a great scene for a movie, wouldn't it?

But He didn't. God used a man. A man well advanced in age. A man who had experience walking with God and serving others.

Friends, how does God want to use you? And how does He want to use whatever you're going through right now to prepare you for even greater use later? The best thing you can do with your life is spend it in the service of God, and He doesn't put term limits or age restrictions on that – either maximums or minimums. Keep that in mind as we go through Joshua – keep in mind that God also wants to use *you* to do amazing things for His people.

Now, before we jump into the book of Joshua, we need an overview of the Bible up to this point so that we see where this book fits.

The Bible begins with the book of **Genesis**, the book of beginnings. In Genesis you find the description of God making the world and making human beings. You find Adam and Eve

and the first sin and God's promise to deal with it one day. You find Cain and Abel. You find Noah and the ark. And then you find Abraham, a man that God called out of the area that is modern day Iraq, and told him: "I want to do something you didn't even ask for. I want to bless you, I want to give you children, and a place to raise them, and I want to grow your family to eventually become the nation of Israel, and through that nation, I will bring My Son, the Messiah, into the world."

And you see all of that happen in the book of Genesis - except the part about the Messiah of course, that's Jesus and He doesn't come along for about another 2000 years. But you do see Abraham and his wife Sarah have their son Isaac, who later has a son named Jacob, who's name is changed to Israel and he has a bunch of sons who become the 12 tribes of Israel. By the end of the book, the family has grown substantially and Joseph, one of the 12, is down in Egypt as Pharaoh's second in command - he was the one with the amazing Technicolor dream coat if you're much into theater productions.

Then, there's a drought in what we would call modern day Israel, where this family of Israel is living, so they wind up going down to Egypt where Joseph has a cushy government job and is able to take care of the family. I'm leaving out a lot of the details of course, but I want to remind us of the big picture.

The next book is **Exodus**, and when it opens we find that Joseph has died and years have gone on, and the family/nation of Israel is getting bigger and bigger, but they're still in Egypt and without their brother in government, they eventually become enslaved by the powers that be. This goes on for about 400 years until eventually God raises up a man by the name of Moses to lead them out of slavery and back north into the land that God had promised Abraham - the land we call Israel today.

And so, you've heard the stories of the plagues that God sent upon Egypt. The last plague was the death of the first born for everyone who didn't slaughter a lamb and cover the door posts of their house with it's blood. If they did, death would 'Passover' that house and the firstborn would live. You might be interested to know - that Joshua, the man who wrote the book we're about to study, was alive at that time, and we learn later in (1 Chron 7:20-27) that he was actually the first born son of his father - in other words, his life was on the line and depended entirely upon his family's obedience. Think about that some time and consider, mom and dad, how your obedience today might shape the world tomorrow. The son they protected, through obedience to God, grew up to lead the nation.

Well, after the night of the Passover the Egyptian Pharaoh had had enough and finally agreed to let the Israelites go free, but then, as they headed off into the desert, he changed his mind and chased after them. So, God parted the waters of the sea that was in front of His people and they crossed on dry land, and as the Egyptian army came in after them He closed the waters and they all drowned. It was a dramatic and defining miracle for the people of Israel, a way of knowing, clearly, beyond all shadow of a doubt, that God was doing something great in their lives.

As they continued their journey, the Amalekites, another group living in the area attacked them. That war is described in Exodus 17:8-13 where we discover that a man by the name of Joshua led the Israeli troops into battle.¹ This is that same battle where Aaron and Hur lifted Moses' arms. Moses was on the hill praying for the battle; Joshua was down in the fray leading it. We need both in this life, don't we?

Joshua goes on to become Moses' right hand man, serving as his personal assistant for forty years. If Moses was the president, Joshua was the chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

After the war with the Amalekites, God led the Israel to Mount Sinai where He met with Moses and gave the Ten Commandments. And later, as Moses climbed the mountain to meet with God, Joshua went up with him (Ex 24:13). And then later still, when Moses built a tent near the tabernacle, Joshua stayed there and kept an eye on things whenever Moses had to leave (Ex 33). So Joshua was never far from what God was doing through Moses, he was learning and observing a lot of things indirectly.

During that time at Mount Sinai, God gave Moses instruction on how the people were supposed to live and worship – you find all of that information in the third book of the Bible, **Leviticus**.

After Leviticus comes **Numbers**. There we find the people on the move toward the Promised Land, and in Numbers 13-14 Moses sends out twelve men, one from each of the twelve tribes, on a long-range reconnaissance mission. They're supposed to go spy out this new land, see what's like, and bring back a report.

When they return, ten of the twelve are scared. They say there's no way we can do this, people live there, and they're going to crush us. But two say, "No, no, no! We can do this – if God with us, and He is, we can do this. Look at all God has already done for us!" Those two men were Joshua and Caleb.

Unfortunately, everyone listens to the other ten and people start to freak out and worry and even rebel against Moses and His God-ordained leadership. So God says, "You know what? There are going to be consequences for your unbelief. You've seen all that I can do. You saw all the plagues of Egypt, you saw the waters of the sea part, you walked through on dry ground; you've seen me defend and protect you, you've eaten miraculous food and drank miraculous water, but you don't believe I can give you this land? Fine. You're going to go back into the desert into a forty year long time-out and only your children will live in the place I've promised. Well, your children and two more: Joshua and Caleb – the two who believed you could do it."

That brings us to **Deuteronomy**. Deuteronomy is a second retelling of the law – that is, how God wants the people to live and worship. As the first generation is dying off, God has

¹ Joshua appears 27 times in the Pentateuch from the first mention in Ex 17:9, to mentions in Numbers, to the final mention in Deuteronomy 34:9.

Moses review everything for the younger generation so they know what's expected as they prepare to enter this Promised Land.

After that refresher, we find Moses on his deathbed passing the leadership of the nation to Joshua.

Deu 31:1 Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. 2 And he said to them: "I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the LORD has said to me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan.' 3 The LORD your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the LORD has said. 4 And the LORD will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land, when He destroyed them. 5 The LORD will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. 6 **Be strong and of good courage**, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He *is* the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

7 Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "**Be strong and of good courage**, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. 8 And the LORD, He *is* the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed."

Deu 31:23 Then He (God) inaugurated Joshua the son of Nun, and said, "**Be strong and of good courage**; for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land of which I swore to them, and I will be with you."

After this, you have the last couple of chapters where Moses pronounces a blessing on the different tribes, and ultimately dies leaving Joshua in charge, facing the enormous task of moving God's people into this new land. That's where the book of Joshua begins: Moses is dead, the people are on the border of the Promised Land, and it's time to move out.

So now let's turn to Joshua 1 and discover what God wants to do:

Joshua 1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: 2 "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and 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; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

God tells Joshua – it's your turn now.

His turn to be a part of what God has been doing and will keep on doing. It's important for Joshua, and us, to know - God is the one at work. Moses didn't save people from Egypt –

God did. He used Moses, but God did it. God has a plan for the world and He will use people to accomplish it, but we need to keep the proper perspective, it's really God at work.

Joshua was the next person to be used after Moses, but after Joshua passed away it fell to someone else, and on and on it kept going because God's work kept going and now, after Christ has come, it's spider webbed and fragmented and come to each of us.

If you are Christian today, you need to know that you have a part to play too. God is calling you to something, but it's something He is doing. You need to know that and believe it for your situation; somehow, somewhere God has provided the raw materials for this job to be done. Whatever situation you are in, if God has called you to it, He will see you through it.

That doesn't mean it will be easy. It doesn't mean you won't be stretched and grow, but if God has called you to it, He will see you through it. God is calling Joshua to this task and there can be no avoiding it or shirking the responsibility.

He has to 'man up' or 'cowboy up' or cowgirl up, what you want to say. It's time to be an adult and do something important for other people. It won't be easy, it won't make everybody happy – not even the people He's called to serve and lead, but it's got to be done.

Fortunately, God's calling always comes with His enabling – so, with the job comes a promise. He tells Joshua something he's already heard from Moses:

Joshua 1:6 Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. **7 Only be strong and very courageous**, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. **8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe 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. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."**

Now, let me ask: How do you think you're supposed to fulfill your responsibilities in life?

Some say you need to think positive thoughts, you've got to have good self-talk. Some say you need a relentless pursuit of perfection and advancement, or you need to know people and be connected. But God tells Joshua: the only way you're going to survive the responsibility I've given you is to stay tightly tethered to Me.

And that's going to take two forms. The same two forms you and I experience today.

First, God says, you need to be in My Word – you need to read your Bible. That was easy for Joshua, it was just five books at the time.

8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe 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.

Friends, God gave us a book about life and the afterlife. God gave us a book about Himself, a book that should be the foundation of our lives. We need to be turning to it for guidance and direction, *especially when life feels overwhelming!* Joshua has 2M people looking to him for guidance and direction. I'd say he's got a lot of responsibilities, a lot to consider. *But it was precisely for that reason* that God told him – you need to be in My Word regularly.

Friends, that is still true with us today. We need to be in God's Word. But it constantly gets pushed out, doesn't it? If you have to cut something out of your day, it's most likely going to be Bible reading and prayer, because you can always do it later, right? Like going to the gym. But here's the crazy thing – God tells us Joshua, *because you've got so much to do, make sure you're in the Word.*

Some of you may have heard Martin Luther's famous quote: "I have so much to do today that I'm going to need to spend three hours in prayer in order to be able to get it all done."²

Luther understood this strange paradox, that often by spending time with God, we reap dividends in other areas of life. Spending time with Him can often give us wisdom, insight, and correction that will help us be even more productive, efficient, or valuable through the rest of our day.

Three hours a day isn't practical for many of us, and you might be comforted to know that it wasn't often practical for Luther either, this quote is attributed to a time when he was in hiding in a castle for fear of his life.

But, something we might want to consider are the words of Job:

Job 23:12 I have not departed from the commandment of His lips;
I have treasured the words of His mouth
More than my necessary *food*

This has led some to adopt the saying: No Bible, no breakfast. Now, that's pretty easy for some of you because you don't eat breakfast anyway, but you get the point. And, since God told Joshua to be in the Word day and night, others have added: no Bible, no bed.

Now, I'm not here advocating some dry, tedious, habit you have to adopt, but I do want to encourage you, especially if you're busy with kids or commuting or whatever the case may be, to still find time for God's word, because at times like that, it's as relevant as ever for your life and may be the way God guides you in the challenges you face.

² <http://virginiahuguenot.blogspot.com/2010/03/luthers-three-hours-of-prayer.html>

The second thing that God promised Joshua was His presence – so, God’s tangible Word, a Bible we can hold, and His intangible presence, that knowledge that He is with us everywhere we go.

Look at

9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God *is* with you wherever you go.”

Jesus made very similar promises to us in Matt 28 at the Great Commission and in Acts 1:8 when He promised that the Holy Spirit would give us strength to do everything He calls us to do. Christian, this verse is addressed to Joshua, but it applies just as equally to you. God is with you!

With one very important caveat. These promises of divine presence and power are to enable and encourage us to do His will, not our own. The Promise of God’s Presence is for following Him – not for doing whatever you want.

In Joshua’s case, it’s for doing something that is going to impact an entire nation of people. Friends, I can’t say it enough, so often, God wants to us you to be a blessing to others, but when He does, He will always be your strength. So trust in him and move out like Joshua:

Joshua 1:10 Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, **11** “Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, ‘Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess.’”

12 And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh Joshua spoke, saying, **13** “Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, ‘The LORD your God is giving you rest and is giving you this land.’”

14 Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side of the Jordan. But you shall pass before your brethren armed, all your mighty men of valor, and help them, **15** until the LORD has given your brethren rest, as He *gave* you, and they also have taken possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and enjoy it, which Moses the LORD’s servant gave you on this side of the Jordan toward the sunrise.”

16 So they answered Joshua, saying, “All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. **17** Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the LORD your God be with you, as He was with Moses.

18 Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. **Only be strong and of good courage.”**

Those are familiar words, aren’t they?

Joshua receives confirmation of God’s calling through the people God has called him to lead.

Church, you have the opportunity to encourage your leaders as well. I want to publicly thank people like Don Patterson, Ginnie Hayes, and Dave and Anne Hall and many others who were so vocal and direct with their encouragement and support as we married the two churches – your encouragement and support were nourishing to me, my family, and the rest of staff, so thank you.

And let me encourage us all to be an encouragement to others. Don't be gratuitous, don't be forced or fake, but if your small group leader, your worship leader, your Sunday School teacher, whatever, is a blessing to you, let them know. And if you're visiting with us – go back home and tell your pastor, we believe in you, we support you, and as long as you're following Jesus, we'll go with you. Only be strong, and of good courage!

And ladies, what about the leader of your home? Do you think of him this way? Do you pray for him this way? Do you remind your husband that God is with him? Does your husband know that you will follow him? Do you remind him to be strong and of good courage? Madeleine knows this because I've told it to her countless times: I can face just about anything the world throws our way if I know that Christ is in and she is beside me.

Does your husband know that you'll go with him? Does he know that he has your encouragement and support? He might not tell you, but needs to know. He wants to know. He needs to hear you say that you're still on his team, no matter what you face, no matter what comes your way. He needs to hear God say, "be strong and of good courage" but ladies, he needs to hear it from you too. Do you remember the verse we looked at last week? Phil 1:19 "For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,"

There really is something to both – knowing God is there, of course, but also knowing you're there as well.

We're going to stop there for this morning. Next week, we'll pick things up with the story of Rahab and Jericho and we'll explore the ethics of deception and lying and the hope of redemption in the midst of judgment. But this morning we needed to see the big picture of how all of this fits into history and God's effort to redeem us all from the power of sin.

Here's what I hope you can take away this morning:

1. Know that God is real, and really at work in the world. That even as people pass away, God's work carries on.
2. Know that God has a place for you in that work – it doesn't matter how young or old you are, it matters how God He is.
3. Especially on your busiest days, find time to remember who you are in Christ – make time to read God's Word, pray, and remember that He is with you. That's where you're going to find the strength and courage you need for the day.

Let's pray.