

Series: Transition

March 8, 2020

Title: Be Strong and Courageous

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Text: Joshua 1:1-9

Marching Orders

Exodus End:

The moment had finally come: a coalition of desert-dwelling tribes found themselves at the end of a 40 year long journey. With just a handful of exceptions, none of them could even remember the beginning of this journey. The first generation travelers had all died along the way to the Promised Land. Now, their children and grandchildren found themselves at the *end of the Exodus journey*.

From their campsites on the eastern side of the Jordan Valley they could see the hills of the Promised Land. I wonder what went through their minds as they stared across the Jordan River. Their parents had exchanged living in the cities and towns of one the world's great civilizations for a brand new life as nomadic shepherds, wandering from oasis to oasis in a vast desert. Now, the next generation was facing the challenge of exchanging the desert for the fertile hillsides of Canaan. It would mean folding up their tents and building houses. It would mean digging cisterns and planting vineyards.

It would mean leaving virtually everything they knew behind for a whole new life.

It was there that God first spoke to their new leader, Joshua:

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Joshua 1:1-2 NIV

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites."

Promised Victory:

Crossing the Jordan River meant stepping into enemy territory. Every square inch of the land on the other side of the river belonged to one king or another. If they wanted to possess this Promised Land, they would have to fight for it.

As Joshua contemplated what it meant to obey God and cross the river with the Israelites, God continued to speak to him:

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Joshua 1:3-5 NIV

"I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Take a moment with me to unpack the amazing promises in these verses:

- "It's all yours for the taking!" The same promise that God had made to Moses He was reiterating to Joshua. God's plan had not changed during the last 40 years. This was now more than ever the *Promised Land!*
- "No one will be able to stand against you!" No matter how huge the obstacles, Joshua and his people would come out on top. This was no "fool's errand." God would give them victory.
- "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." The same God who had led them out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, and through the desert would be there with them every step of the way.

Be Strong and Courageous!

So much for what God promised to do. Now, He tells Joshua what *he* must do:

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Joshua 1:6 NIV

"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them."

"Be strong and courageous." The one thing that could derail the entire enterprise was *fear*. 38 years before, God had given the command to go into the Promised Land of Canaan and take possession of it, but the Israelites of that generation had turned back because they were afraid. They saw the fortified cities of the Canaanites; they saw the mighty warriors on the city walls. And they gave in to fear.

This time, God says to Joshua: "Don't repeat the sin and failure of that generation. Be strong and courageous!"

As a church we stand on the brink of our own "Jordan River." We've journeyed for a generation together. Now it's time for a new leader and a new mission. We stare across the river at the fortified cities of a secular culture. We catch glimpses of the giants of addiction that ravage the land. We look at ourselves and rightly wonder what difference we could possibly make if we dare to cross the river.

And God says: "Be strong and courageous!"

Faithfulness key to courage is faithfulness

Stay true to God's Word:

So how do we find that kind of strength and courage? Are we supposed to give ourselves a pep talk every morning, listen to some upbeat music and then go out the door to take on the world?

Listen to what God tells Joshua to do so that he can be “strong and courageous”:

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Joshua 1:7-8 NIV

“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, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

The Book of the Law was not just some set of rules for good living that God had given to Israel. It was the document that laid out the terms of the covenant between God and His people. It was the treaty between them, complete with God’s promise of protection and presence on the one hand, and what God expected of His people as His subjects on the other.

To be “strong and courageous” meant first and foremost to be *faithful* to God. He was Commander-in-Chief for this campaign. And He had spelled out how Israel was to live and worship – whether in the desert or in the Promised Land.

Key to Success!

Notice the emphasis God puts on *success*.

- “Obey all the law my servant Moses gave you...that you may be successful wherever you go.”
- “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips....Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

Israel was to obey the law in what she did and was to “meditate on it day and night” in all she thought and purposed. Only then would she succeed in her mission.

Faithfulness:

God is calling us to do the same thing in our day. Some things change. Some things never change. As a church we face a new day with new leadership. We face challenges that would have been unimaginable a generation ago. We face opportunities that have never existed before.

But God hasn't changed. And God's Word hasn't changed. The New Covenant that Jesus enacted by dying for us and rising again is still in force! God will not rewrite the 10 Commandments to accommodate the craziness of our world. He calls us to be faithful to His Word. God will not renegotiate the price of redemption for our sins. Jesus died once for all.

God is calling us to be first and foremost *grounded in His Word* as we tackle the challenges before us. We are to *obey* and *meditate*. Actions and thoughts. New challenges? Yes. But we carry within us the unchanging Word of God!

Be Strong and Courageous

So what is God saying to us this morning as we look across the river at a new time and new opportunities?

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Joshua 1:9 NIV

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

- No place for fear or discouragement. God is commanding *courage*. God is commanding *strength*. And what God commands, God provides.
- God is promising His Presence. He will be with our church wherever we go and whatever we face. We're not in this alone.

Jesus said much the same thing to His disciples as they stared into a brand new world. Jesus had conquered death and was about to ascend to the Father. But before He did so, He gave them their marching orders:

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Matthew 28:16-20 NIV

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

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"herefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The Promised Land they were to possess was not a physical land in the Middle East. It was the whole wide world! Jesus made the same promises to His disciples that God had made to Joshua: I have the authority and power to make you succeed. Be faithful to My Word. I will never leave you – "I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

What He said to them, He says to us today: Be Strong and Courageous!