

Joshua 1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 February 2020

Preacher: Neil DM MacLeod

[0 : 0 0] Now, as I've hinted heavily already, we're looking at Joshua chapter 1 tonight, so perhaps you could turn there just now. And as you turn there, let me tell you about the great Victorian general Charles Gordon. Charles Gordon was once in China speaking to a Chinese leader on behalf of the British Empire. He was there. He asked that Chinese leader, how was humanity divided? The leader said, humanity is divided into three types of people. There are those who are movable, those who are immovable, and those who move others. Joshua is the third of those types. He moves other people. This book named Afternoon shows the remarkable impact this man had on moving the nation of Israel from being a landless nation, wandering through the desert, to being a settled nation, leading them as a brilliant war strategist against the enemies of God. And so this book of Joshua is really a book about leadership. It's a book on how to lead, and it's a book on how to pray for leaders as well. It's also a book about followers, because followers make excellent leaders. All leaders need to know how to follow. This book is also about living a victorious Christian life, about marching in step to heaven, equipped to do that with the strength of our Jesus, our Joshua, as he directs us there. And this first chapter of Joshua is really a chapter about encouragement. That's perhaps what we need most sometimes, is encouragement. More than training or seminars, more than any number of other things you could name.

Encouragement, encouraging one another, upholding one another, praying for one another, caring for one another, encouraging one another. We need that encouragement to breathe in our church life, in our community life, in our relationships, in our professional lives. And perhaps if you're given new responsibilities and new challenges, encouragement will be something that you will crave as well.

So let me take you through this first chapter of Joshua as we think about some of those issues. We're going to read verses one to nine first of all, and then we'll think about the issues that arise from there. After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' assistant, 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. 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 great sea on the west.

No one will be able to stand up 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. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

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.

[3 : 5 8] Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth. 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. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified. Do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

I wonder if you notice the encouragement to this new leader, to this man. He's reminded of his commission in these first two verses. God has made it clear to Joshua that he was following on from Moses. He would succeed Moses. And so for a second, imagine that you are Joshua. Moses is dead. His sandals lie empty.

And it falls to you to step into those sandals and to lead this nation of one million people. How would you feel? Pretty daunted. I would feel pretty daunted by that. Perhaps you would feel like Winston Churchill felt when he became prime minister, when he said that he felt like a pygmy standing on the shoulders of giants. Joshua must have felt weak and feeble. And yet he is assured of Moses all through this.

Moses is really influential all the way through the book of Joshua. His name appears 50 times. Joshua is not to forget what Moses has done, what Moses' witness was like. But the era of Moses is finished.

God buries his workers. His work goes on. Joshua needs to hear that. And perhaps you need to hear that as well in a new context that you are in, in your work community, in your professional life, in your student life. God encourages you. Moses is dead. Now go on. Leaders don't go on forever. And God calls for a new leadership to arise. And sometimes that leadership has a test to face. Are we prepared to recognize a new ministry, a new context, a new situation? No point looking back. Joshua needs to hear that.

[6 : 38] Do you know the last seven words of any organization? We've always done it that way. We've always done it that way. Stephen Gottroger, a commentator, says, the stick in the muds want it yesterday. The trendies want it tomorrow. But where are those who want it today? I am passionate about what God is doing today. And maybe God is saying to you this evening, let go of the failures and the successes of the past. Don't live in the past or the future, but live in the present in God's new day. Joshua has waited a long time to hear that. Joshua is about forced to hear when he left Egypt. And two years later, he stood alone with Caleb in front of the Hall of Israel, offering them his leadership, telling them that Canaan was there for the taking. Come on. Come on. Let's go. We can do this. We can take Canaan. Never mind the giants. Don't worry about them. God is on our side and we can do this. God has provided everything that we need.

But you know what happened? We read it together. The people listened to the other spies. They flunked the test. They could only see the problems and the difficulties. They were too big to conquer. There was giants there. We felt like grasshoppers. These were too big to be conquered. And that unbelief delayed the Israelites for 38 years in a desert. 38 years before the conquest of the land. Joshua had to live with the rejection for 38 years. Imagine that. He had to wait for that entire generation to die out in the wilderness. Not one of them would see the promised land. All your contemporaries, you are Joshua, you are Caleb, all your contemporaries died. Imagine tonight, everybody in this room, over 20, has died because of the faithlessness. How shocking that would be. These people, the faithless spies, the nation of Israel, only saw the problems and not the opportunities.

There's a few lessons for us here. Leadership needs to know not only how to win, but also how to accept defeat. The mark of a leader is not how successful or wonderful you are.

It's how to cope with defeat and failure. And leaders are often prepared for greater things by the small decisions that they make, even in the face of opposition. Small decisions like, for us perhaps, will I form a good habit? Will I regularly go to church? Will I regularly go to the prayer meeting? Will I regularly read my Bible? Will I make these small, day-by-day decisions to shape my character and to who I am? So don't be afraid of being in a minority. Don't be afraid to live by your principles, even if you are the only one. These little decisions will make or unmake you as the man or women of God. It also seems that leaders can be late in discovering their life's work.

Some do not enter what God has planned for the ministry till much later. So Joshua and Moses for that matter too were about 80 when they were called to lead. And in Joshua's case, he had 30 years of extraordinary effectiveness. So if you are perhaps approaching retirement, perhaps that is the time that you are on the cusp of your greatest effectiveness for the church. Now that's not the way the world sees it. The world operates by completely different standards. In business, if you haven't made it by 40, you never will. In sport, if you're 40, you play in the Veterans League. Gene therapy might let us live longer. So maybe I shouldn't give up just yet of rekindling my rugby career. But maybe God has something really significant for you to do at 40 or 50 or 60 or 70 or 80.

[11 : 09] Here was a man, Joshua, who had learned how to be a servant. And now Joshua is about to become a general. He had learned rejection. He had learned defeat. And yet through these experiences, nothing was wasted.

God reminds Joshua of his commission. And that happens by encouraging Joshua to remind him of the promises that are made.

In verse 5 we read of conquest and victory. It narrates the whole area of where he will conquer. And no one will be able to stand up 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. There are three very specific promises that are given to Joshua. The promise of the land, the promise of God's presence, and the promise of God's word.

And we'll look at each of these briefly in this section. If you do a word study, think of the promise of the land. If you do a word study, the word land is mentioned 86 times in this book. And so clearly it's a key concept that God is communicating here. And for Joshua, his task, his role is to reclaim the land.

[12 : 38] And the structure of the book of Joshua is about how that promise works out. So Joshua 2 to 5 is about crossing the River Jordan and claiming the land. Joshua 6 to 12 is about the defeat of the enemies of Israel. And 13 to 22 is about how the land is apportioned to the tribes. Israel will possess the land because that's his covenant oath to his people.

That's the, their enjoyment of the land will depend on their faithful obedience. God didn't explain how this would be accomplished. Joshua has to respond. He has to trust the promise.

He has to trust God for outcomes. God's promises are prods to goad us to action, not pillows to lie back upon.

God's promise. So, you know, step out in faith and claim those promises of God as we move towards the land that he has promised us. And of course, our ultimate goal of to be with the Lord in heaven.

In terms of the promise of God's promise, this is a direct promise to assure Joshua of God's presence. And he must have felt really, very much under pressure here.

[14 : 06] He might have thought to himself, you know what? God has offered me this task to lead Israel. And I've had a chance before. They flunked it. I'm done. I'm out. I'm going to resign. I'm not doing this.

But maybe that was part of why the reason that we have here is that God keeps reminding Joshua, be strong, be strong. Verse 5, just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Imagine that as an inexperienced leader, having that kind of promise given to you. He has watched over the years as Moses was protected and guided by this Lord, vindicated by this Lord.

And now the same God gives that promise to Joshua. You'll see in the text there, in verse 1, the Lord is in capital letters.

And that is really significant because that means that the sacred name of Jehovah is given. The covenant of God, it means the ever-living one.

[15 : 19] Now, do you really see the contrast there? Moses is dead, says the Lord, the ever-living one. The ever-living one would go on being with Joshua.

God is not only our past deliverer. He is not only our future hope. He is our present help, our contemporary, the ever-living one. Just as the writer to Hebrews takes the same idea of Jesus, our Joshua, never will I leave you nor forsake you.

So we can say with confidence, the Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? For Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

God was with Moses. God was with Joshua. God is with us, is with you. And that is repeated in verse 9 as well.

Have I not commanded you? But there's also the promise of his word. And you can see that in verses 7 and 8. And towards the end of Deuteronomy, at Deuteronomy 31, 9, Moses wrote all that God had commanded into the book of the law.

[16 : 34] And this is a reference to the collection of God's sayings of how the people should live. Commandments, the book of the covenant that recorded the journey to Egypt, to Canaan, and that was kept by the priests.

Now, it's not enough just to guard this book to make sure it's secure. Not even to read it. But what is meant here is to make it part of the inner person. Joshua is told not to let this book out of his mouth.

You keep speaking it to yourself. Keep saying it to yourself. So Joshua puts himself under the truth of the law. Being a Christian isn't just knowing God's law, having it in your head.

It's a matter of doing God's word, of engraving it on your heart, and of it shaping your approach to truth, your approach to lifestyle choices.

It's shaping you, by the grace of God, for you to follow it as well. So may God help us to meditate on some of these issues about how we meditate and think about God's law.

[17 : 38] The great hymn writer, Charles Wesley, said, I want to be a man of just one book. Is that your desire? Is that your desire?

Are you reading daily? Do you imbibe the word of God and think about it and reflect on it and pray on it and use it day by day? I want to know your will, Lord, and I want to do it.

And this is an issue about leadership as well. Joshua was prepared to put himself under the word, to be an example to the people, to put themselves under the authority of God's word.

And within the church, that is the only basis of leadership at all. Leaders don't have authority in and off themselves. They have authority under the word of God.

So the man or the woman of God has to put him or herself under the word of God, to be a people of one book. So the leader, God encourages this new leader.

[18 : 41] Let's read together verses 10 to 15. So Joshua ordered the officers of the people, go through the camp and tell the people, get your supplies ready.

Three days from now, you will cross to Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God has given you for your own. But to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, remember the command that Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you.

The Lord your God has given you rest and has granted you this land. Your wives, your children, your livestock, may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan.

All your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers until the Lord gives them rest as he has done for you, until they have taken possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving them.

After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise. I wonder when reading that, if it clocked how unusual this request is, how odd this request might have sounded.

[20 : 04] Here it's written to Israel, you need to get your own supplies. No longer will you receive heavenly manna. No longer will I provide for you.

You have to take charge of your own food supplies. There comes a time in life when we have to accept responsibility for the future that God has prepared for us by doing our part.

And there is in the Bible a great balance between the power and sovereignty of God and human responsibility. You're not always going to have it on a plate.

Not just in terms of meals, but in terms of your spiritual life as well. So sometimes it's good to put ourselves into faith-stretching situations. That's why your course in Discipleship Explored is such a good thing to do, to train us as to how to be good disciples, of how to understand the word and how to reach out to other people as well.

God has told the people here, there is no turning back. We are crossing the Jordan. Now, are you ready? Are you ready to make that crossing?

[21 : 15] This may involve a difficult choice, a difficult decision. A decision to stay or go might affect the rest of your life. But the reassurance is that not only is God on this side, but he is also on the other side of the river as well.

So get ready to take responsibility. We will not possess the land if we wait for God to do it by moving forward together step by step.

We can't just sit on the bank and wait for things to happen. We have to move forward, trusting in the promises that are given. And in verse 11, we have the indication that we move forward step by step.

This is not going to be won overnight. This is not going to be won in some great battle. This is going to be won little by little, progressively.

Many years before, God had revealed what the strategy was. If you read in Exodus chapter 23 and at verses 28 through 30, the following words will be found.

[22 : 19] I will set the hornet ahead of you to drive out the Hivites, Canaanites, Hittites out of the way. I will not drive them out in a single year because the land would become desolate and wild animals too numerous for you.

Little by little, I will drive them out before you until you have increased enough to take possession of the land. I will not drive out in a single year.

Little by little, step by step, progressively. But why not just one big battle and get it over and done with? One battle, we're done, we can move forward.

Why the constant daily warfare of my Christian life, of decisions I have to make, why is temptation never far away, seeking me to pull me away and distract me and pull me from my target of where I want to get?

Why? It is thus because we are reminded that we do not settle here. This is not our home.

[23 : 24] I have not arrived here by one great decision. My Christian life is one of step by step. But also in this world that I live in, I am not a tourist.

I am a pilgrim moving forward, trusting my Lord step by step. And as we go forward together, we go forward step by step with the Lord, trusting him step by step, not taking rash decisions, but trusting God for the way that we are to go.

Now verse 12 is a remarkable little verse about the half tribe of Manasseh. Now they were, sorry, the two and a half tribes there. They were cattle farmers, and so they were particularly interested in having the fertile land to farm their cattle on.

But they were also to give over their fighting men to fight for the rest of the Israelites until God gave rest. And rest is another key concept in this book of Joshua.

These two and a half tribes had to sacrifice for the greater good, to forgo the pleasure of resting, of having finally reached their promised land and to continue fighting until all God's people enjoyed rest.

[24 : 41] We are reminded that we do not sit in isolation. We are in this together as a body of Christ. As a body, we do not rest until all have found rest.

And that applies to all God's people wherever they are to be found throughout the world. We, when we read of the persecuted church, we suffer with them.

When we, let me tell you a story. I was in Russia a few years ago, and I met a, I won't say his name since this is recorded, I met a man who was a Christian.

He was an old man. And he told me about his grandfather who grew up in the time of this, of the Tsar. And he was an evangelical Christian, his grandfather.

His grandfather was persecuted by the Tsarist secret police, the Okrana. Then his father grew up and became a pastor. And his father was persecuted by Stalin.

[25 : 52] And then when he grew up, he joined the consul or the, the kind of communist equivalent of the scouts, I suppose. And he was persecuted and excluded when he became a Christian.

And now that he has a publishing company and publishes Christian literature, he is now persecuted by Putin and his government. There was some scepticism about evangelical Christians.

And I said, my friend, you know, in the West, we've prayed for the persecuted church in Russia for years. And it's a real privilege to meet someone like you, to see who we've been praying for and what you do and how you cope with the pressure of persecution.

And he said, well, we pray for you in the West because we see you as a persecuted church with the, the, the societal and social pressures that are upon you to conform to things that are not biblical.

Together, East and West, united in praying for one another, caring for one another, sharing for one another, loving one another, encouraging one another.

[27 : 07] You and I cannot rest until all God's people are at rest. Let's read the final two verses here.

Then they answered Joshua, whatever you have commanded us, we will do. Whatever you send us, we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you.

Only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your word, whatever you may command them will be put to death.

Only be strong and courageous. Here, the people encouraged the leader. They answered, we will do. It must be great to lead a committed people for a leader who is only so strong as the people who follow.

And here, the Israelites ask and have no agendas. There's no concessions, there's no deals cut. They would never conquer the land unless everybody was fully committed to the task.

[28 : 15] There is complete obedience and they promised to pray for him. And that's the best thing that we can do for those who lead us. So can I encourage you to pray for your leaders here, pray for your session and for your deacon's court, for people who lead in Sunday school and in discipleship, who lead the worship, who will be involved and discipleship explored, who will be on your vacancy committee.

Pray for them and look after them. Missionaries like letters and emails and parcels, like contact, they like to know that people pray for them.

Do you live your life bringing the large and small decisions before the Lord? Or is it only when you have an accident, when there's a real disaster, when really you're in your foxhole that you pray to God?

It proves that these people were looking to God for the answers. We put leaders under enormous pressure, pressure that is unbearable if we think that they have all the answers.

Sometimes leaders don't have all the answers. But we look to the one who does have the answers, who has control of history, who has foreordained all things and who is in control.

[29 : 30] And we trust that Lord. They were not praying for another Moses. They were not praying for someone from the past. But they wanted God to be with this man, just as he was with Moses.

Leaders change, generations change, styles and structures might change, but the lesson of Joshua 1 is that God does not change.

And that is the important thing. God, the Lord, the triune Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit does not change. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

my friends, churches often stand on Jordans. As Christians, how will we proceed?

The old ways may not be appropriate, but God has not changed. He has the same resources, only now be strong and courageous. He will raise up a new generation, a new leadership, for a new era and he will encourage us with his promises of his word and his presence.

[30 : 49] These leaders encourage the people and the people encourage their leaders. And so start now by encouraging just one person in the church and thanking God for them.

Maybe the person beside you, the person that you know, somebody that you've never spoken to before. Encourage them, pray for them and tell them to encourage them as well.

And so with these thoughts, let's just close with a word of prayer. Our gracious and ever-blessed Lord, we thank you, Father, that you are our leader.

You are the captain of our salvation. You are our Alpha and Omega. You are the one who knew us before we knew ourselves, who has called us by name, who knows us better than we know ourselves.

And we look to you as our leader and as our guide. We look to your word, Father, to shape us and change us. We look to you, Lord Jesus, to be close to us and to accept our worship and our praise and to rule in our lives as our friend and as our king.

[32 : 08] We pray, Jesus, to move amongst us and bind us together and knit us together with unity. The unity that cares one another and loves one another and cherishes one another and lets not one slip away.

We pray, Lord, that you would be in the midst of us, encourage us and lift our eyes that we may glorify and testify that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And this we pray in his name. Amen.