

Meeting the Challenge of Fear God's charge to Joshua

Intro: Sometimes life presents us challenges that simply scare us. We may think that we are not up to the challenge, and may want to retreat. Here's where God's words to those who've lived before us can help.

We are not unique in facing intimidating circumstances. Many of the Bible's heroes found themselves in the very same circumstances; and God came to them with a word of encourage when they needed it. The Scriptures record these episodes for our sake so that we, to use Paul's words, "through faith and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Rom. 15:4). I'm thinking today of Joshua and the words the Lord spoke to him in Joshua 1. Consider for a few moments:

Joshua's Challenge

It was a critical time in Joshua's life. He had just received one of the most intimidating assignments of his life. For years he had served under the tutelage and mentorship of Moses, but now Moses has died, and it falls into Joshua's hands to lead the children of Israel into the land of Canaan in conquest. We can surely sympathize with the fear and intimidation that Joshua must have felt.

His past experience with his fellow-Israelites had not been very encouraging.

Many years before, he had seen a murmuring and faithless people balk in fear at God's command to enter the promised land..

He had seen his generation die in the wilderness.

He had seen the Israelites get to Moses and keep him from entering the Promised Land.

His present circumstances were not very encouraging

Joshua was now 40 years older.

He did not have Moses to lean on for wisdom and advice.

He was leading a group of Israelites who had not seen the Lord's marvelous works in the land of Egypt; and were more likely to be overcome with fear, doubt and rebellion.

Understandably he felt weak and fearful in view of the immensity of the task before him. In short, Joshua needed a spiritual "pep talk."

How the Lord Encouraged Joshua. He urged him to:

Accept the responsibility God had laid upon him

Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. (Joshua 1:1-2)

Moses is dead! Joshua surely knew that; but maybe he just hoped that his exalted hero would come back down that mountain and take over again. But it was not to be. Now he, Moses' servant, was in charge; and he had to accept that responsibility. There was no value living in the past.

*"You and all this people cross this Jordan"--*Joshua was God's man-- God's chosen leader. It was his charge to lead these people over the Jordan and in successful conquest of the land.

Trust the promises that He had made

...now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun, will be your territory. No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. (Joshua 1:2-6)

For centuries Israel had lived in the hope of the promise God made to Abraham--*"I will give you this land"*. Would Israel now reject these promises or would they believe in them? In strong words God urges Joshua to trust Him to do what He had promised to do.

Moreover God promised His presence as he undertook the challenge of conquering the land. *"I will be with you, just as I have been with Moses. I will not fail you or forsake you."*

God promised that He would ensure his success--*"No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life."*

God promised to work through him. *"You will give this people possession of the land."*

Be loyal to His word

Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. (Joshua 1:7-8)

God urged Joshua to show total loyalty to His word.

Do all that I have commanded--v. 7

Do not add to nor delete from it--v. 8

Meditate upon it constantly--v. 8

Be ready to share it with others (do not let it depart from your mouth).

Be strong and courageous

God responds to Joshua's feelings of weakness and fear with the challenge to rise above them--to let his faith in God, His promises, and his word motivate him to act with inner strength and courage.

Twice God says to him, "*Be strong and courageous!*" (Josh. 1:6, 9)

How God encourages us!

How often are like Joshua!

We too face what appear to be monstrous challenges--life-threatening disease, unexpected loss, broken relationships. And we may be intimidated by the challenges of God's work in a unbelieving world. But when our best efforts seem to not be enough, when our past experiences give little encouragement for the future before us, when so much seems to be demanded and we seem to have so little to give, when our assignment seems bigger than our ability to meet it, God tells us how we can overcome the intimidation and meet the challenge of our calling.

But first, like Joshua, we must accept responsibility.

Today when we face life's challenges we cannot live in the past. We could wish that others stronger than us were here to help us; but we must accept responsibility to live out our faith, not rely upon theirs. We have to work with the hand life has dealt us. We have to take responsibility for our own lives and calling.

Like Joshua we need to trust His promises.

Everything that God said to Joshua, he has also said to us.

and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

(Matthew 28:20)

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.

What shall man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6)

How encouraging this is to know that God will be with us and never fail us. He sees us as a saved people on the other shore. He sees us as a successful people able to reach others for the Lord.

Like Joshua we need to stay loyal to the truth. We need to be focused on:

Knowing God's word.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

Faithfully doing God's word

teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; (Matthew 28:20)

Focused on obedience without alteration

Like Joshua, we must be strong and courageous.

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.

(Ephesians 6:10)

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, (2 Timothy 1:7-8)

Conclusion: Whatever the challenge is--whether to overcome a personal situation in our lives or to do our part in fighting for the cause of Christ--we need to hear again and again the Lord's message to Joshua and to us.

We are God's army to take the gospel to others. We must not get discouraged but continue to work; to be encouraged; faithful, strong, courageous, and loyal to God's plan. With His help we can be successful.

We live in a world of pain and suffering; but we have resources to get through whatever life throws at us.

Remember the words of the Savior to his disciples:

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32)