

Joshua 1

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you very much for your welcome. It's lovely to be back with you. It's been, I think, a couple of years since I've been able to be here. And so it was great to be welcomed at the door by two ladies who said to me, you're looking younger.

It's amazing how you're greeted when you go out to speak at various churches. So that ranks right up there. So thank you for that. I guess I'm still not young enough to get the lunch afterwards. So I'll have to go home. There you go. Thank you, too, for giving me the liberty to come and talk to you about anything at all. That's a huge risk for congregations, can I just say.

A huge risk that the preacher comes and brings a hobby horse out the cupboard and takes it for a canter for 20 minutes or so. So thank you for that.

It's given me the freedom to share with you some thoughts that God has given to me over a number of months as Joshua and I have hung out together.

[1 : 05] I've been thinking a lot about what I should be doing as I go forward. Just to update you from Graham's comments, I'm no longer an elder at Bellevue Chapel.

It's not that I've done anything wrong and they kicked me off or anything. It was just I thought I'd done it so long that there were far more talented people, a lot younger than me, with a lot more energy, that could do the job a whole lot better.

So in the phrase that goes along with these, I stood down, it makes you sound as if you're on some kind of sort of great elevated position that you stand down from. That's not it at all.

But so there you go. You're up to date in my life. I want to share with you some thoughts from the book of Joshua. So keep that passage open. A great tutor of the New Testament reading.

It helps us just to ground some of that in what the New Testament says to us as well. So thank you for that. We'll not be looking at Ephesians, but you, as you're listening to God this morning, can make the links, I'm sure.

[2 : 12] I've always loved the story of Joshua. I don't know if you, like me, when you were younger, were kind of dragged along to Sunday school, kicking and screaming, knowing that the likelihood is you were going really to listen to something that was probably going to be boring, and you'd far rather get home, get out of your Sunday best.

We don't do Sunday best now, most of us, but we did then, and get out to play. Well, I was always thrilled with the story of Joshua. It appealed to me because there was violence, there was battles. Do you know, and I suspect if Hollywood picked it up, you know, most of our kids wouldn't get to see it. It would be an 18 certificate, I rather suspect.

A Canaanite call girl, you know, cities being plundered. People dying, more blood than death for your average thrill junkie.

Guaranteed, I would imagine, an 18 certificate. I'm sure it will rival Outlander. People tell me that's very good. I've never seen it, and I rather suspect it's probably the type of program Christians shouldn't watch.

[3 : 21] But if you've watched it, don't feel guilty about it. You can always confess and don't watch it again. But I suspect it's probably a bit like that. But Joshua, of course, is not a drama from the pen of someone's overactive imagination.

This drama is the story of God's people. And it's a story, a fantastic account of what it means to bravely and confidently take possession of what God has given to you.

Joshua here is Israel's new leader. He's the successor to Moses. What huge sandals to fill these were. But he's God's man for God's people, for God's moment.

And the whole story, you see, is based on a promise that God has given to his people, that they are to have a land. It's a promise that he gave to Moses as well.

But it goes further back than that, because it was a promise God gave to Abraham, wasn't it? You're going to be the father of a great nation. A nation that I'm going to bless, he tells him in Genesis 12.

[4 : 37] And a nation that I am going to give a land, a place that you will inherit. And so this little story points back in time, and it points forward in time.

And that means that it's not a story, you see, that's locked in history, and we can just forget about it. It's a story we are part of. Because God's great promise to Abraham, God's great promise to Moses, and God's promise to Joshua is a promise to you and me.

Because as we will see towards the end of this morning, it's a promise we are part of. There is still something to come for us. Those of us who are in Christ, those of us who follow the Lord Jesus Christ, are yet to receive an inheritance, the writer tells us.

A place he describes it of rest. A place where you can kick your shoes off, metaphorically, sit up and spend time with Jesus for eternity. Wow, what a place to go into.

So this story then is important for us. It's important for us as individuals because we do need to reflect, don't we, on our place in God's plan.

[5 : 55] It's not that we are all to be Joshers. But we, like him, need to be God's people and we need to be aware of God's plan.

And perhaps like the people then, you're standing on the edge of something that God wants you to do. A promise that you need to take possession of.

And that's a huge theme in this book, you see. Taking possession of what God has promised to you. Now, as I reflected on this story, it occurred to me that here were a group of people who had in the past failed to do that.

And as a result, as you probably know, as they wandered in the desert for 40 years, an entire generation missed out on a promise that God had made to them.

But now there's an opportunity again for them. God always brings us back to opportunity. Even out of failure. What a message. Even out of failure, God brings you back to opportunity.

[7 : 03] And he stands before them again with that message for Joshua and through Joshua to the people. And we find it in verse 2, arise, get up and go and possess what I have promised to you.

Now, I don't know if you like me, when God presents you with something new, an opportunity, a change in direction, a challenge in life.

The first thing you do is bite your fingernails. You begin to worry. You get a bit afraid of what it might look like. And, you know, Joshua was like that.

We find that in verse 9. God has to tell him not to be a scaredy cat, not to get worried, not to be afraid, but to be courageous. And that little phrase about being strong and about being courageous is repeated at least four times in the first chapter.

And it was repeated to him as part of his commissioning service back in when it's recorded in Deuteronomy 31. And you see, there is a quality there for you and I who rely on God.

[8 : 14] Even when the future feels strange and difficult and perhaps frightening. When God is calling you to move into something, to take possession of something.

He also is saying to us to be strong and to be courageous. But that only kicks in, of course, when you arise and you go and you move on.

You see, taking what God wants to give us is never accomplished from a deck chair or a stroll in the park. And for Joshua, there will be barriers to overcome.

There's a river in full flood for a start. He's going to need to get his feet wet. There's going to be battles to fight. Enemies to overcome. Fears and doubts to subdue. And also, perhaps, a whole pile of things that he needs to leave behind and that his people needs to leave behind.

Their failure. Their sin. And there's a big lesson for us right away. If we're going to move forward for God, he encourages us to leave our sins behind. So often we carry them with us on a great sack.

[9 : 20] And we need to leave them in Christ's grace. And that's why the promises and the commands and the experiences of Joshua remain for us timeless and noteworthy.

If, like him, we are to succeed for God. And I want us to focus on what we can learn from these few verses at the beginning of this chapter that will help us take possession.

Help us to understand what it means to really arise and go. To really move at God's command. To conquer our fear and our dismay.

And to experience the real strength and courage that comes when you take God at his word. So four simple things that come from these first nine verses. Here's the first one.

We need to recognize the call of God. I want to say to you, God is always calling his people. Always. That's part of the way he operates.

[10:23] Speaking into our hearts and lives and calling us. You see, every relationship with God starts at his initiative. He places that call into our human hearts.

So often we think, don't we, that we become Christians because, well, it's all started with us. I've decided to follow Jesus, we sometimes sing. I woke up one morning, it seemed like a good idea. Life was pretty bad, so I'm going to follow Jesus. Isn't that the way it works? God places that call into our hearts and lives. And, you know, we hear it. And we respond to it.

And God's call had been made to the children of Israel generations before. He'd made it to Abraham. Get up out of her. Move on.

Go to somewhere I'm going to show you. I'm not telling you where it is, by the way, but I'll show you. Just walk with me. Don't stop. Keep going. He made it to the people of Israel themselves.

[11:21] And in Egypt, they'd been there for hundreds of years. It was their home. It wasn't a particularly great home. They had to work really hard. It was difficult. It was painful. And then God says to them, look, get up and go one night.

Don't stop to pack. Don't bake bread. Just get ready to go. And now Moses is dead. And it's up to Joshua to ensure the people hear God's call to them.

And respond, not by sitting where they are, trying to work out what they should do, but getting on with what God had said to them. How unsettling that must have been for them, arriving at that river. Moses is gone. Joshua, the new leaders there, and they're encamped. And the temptation, I would imagine, would have been to stay for a while.

Well, we can admire Canaan from this side, the safe side. We'll maybe move across when that river's got a bit shallower, or the weather's better.

[12:22] Maybe next week, next month, next year. But God's calling them to get up and to go. Because God is a God who calls his people.

I wonder what God's call in your life might be. Of course, to hear God's call, well, you need to be listening for it for a start.

It might be the first time you've ever really known that God calls people to himself. Maybe you've never thought of that before. You've been coming here for weeks. You've never really thought that God might have something for you to do.

Maybe it's just to come to him in salvation and faith and trust. The New Testament writers talk frequently of people being called into the purposes of God.

That's the big picture. Well, what might God be calling to you as an individual? What's he calling you to do as a group of Christians here in this part of town? Sometimes it's really hard to work these things out, isn't it?

[13:29] But one thing for sure, never does God call us into inactivity. And to be those who admire the view, he calls us into his purposes.

Listen out for his call, please. God is a God who calls. Here's the second thing. If we're to recognize that call of God, we need to accept the promises of God.

What? Joshua has received from God a confirmation here of an ancient promise that was made to Abraham and then to Moses. He's now within touching distance of its fulfillment.

Look at verse 5, an incredible verse. God says to Joshua, No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life, just as I was with Moses. So I will be with you.

I will not leave you or forsake you. What a promise. Or in reality, three promises. A promise of victory. A promise of consistency, just as I was with Moses.

[14:32] That tremendous leader all those years. I'm going to be the same with you. And what's more, I'm not just sending you across there and waving at you from the back. I'm coming with you.

Now he's a soldier, so that must make music to his ears. He's going to be victorious. But all the more so to a leader who's new in his role, feeling the pressure, worrying if the people are going to follow him or they're going to stone him to death for the very idea.

Because in this call, every inch of the land will need fought for. How important to Joshua and the people then to know the faithful promise of God who will never let them down.

Now we could spend hundreds of hours reviewing in Scripture the many, many promises that God has made to his people and to you and me.

And the fantastic truth is that not one of them has ever been broken. Now they're not all intended for us, of course. Some of them are intended for the context in which they come.

[15 : 40] But listen, there are some promises in Scripture that we need to know are absolutely for us. Here's one, Romans 10 and 9.

If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. What a promise.

What a promise. 1 John 1 and 9. If we make it our habit to confess our sins, we were doing that in prayer as Graham led us. What a habit to get into because you know what?

We're sinful. Each and every jolly day it happens to me. And I think one of these days I'm going to get to the end of the day and I'm no need to go and do it.

I won't need to. I've been sinless for a day. Never works. Never works. Something happens. But here if we make it our habit to confess our sins in his faithful righteousness, says John, he forgives us for those sins and he cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

[16 : 41] We're brand new. What a promise. What a promise. In Philippians 4, 19, my God will supply your every need according to his glorious riches in the Messiah, Jesus.

Everything we need. Because that's not always everything we want or everything we think we need. It's in God's view. But it's everything we actually need. But if we are to take God at his word to fulfill his call on our lives, then accepting the promises he has made to us as real promises is vital to our success as a disciple of his.

So let's accept the promises God makes to us. Here's the third thing. We need to stand on the word of God. We need to stand on the word of God.

Now, it would be really hard to underestimate the central importance of God's written word to the progress and to all that God had promised Joshua.

And that's a truth that I would suggest remains for you and for me today. A world in which nothing really kind of matters. I was listening to some nonsense in the radio, Radio Scotland on my way in.

[17 : 57] Some wise and learned individual. I can't remember his name, but he's written some book. I can't even remember the title. But he was talking about God's word evolving. And our understanding of it evolving with it.

Therefore, we could change it to kind of work out where we are at a society. What utter nonsense. I felt myself shouting at the radio the way I shout at the sat-nav. You know, it's funny how you end up shouting with technology.

But there you go. Joshua only had a fraction of the scripture we have. But what he had was not only sufficient. It was integral to keeping his people on track.

He wasn't to go about studying the manuals of war. Rather, he was to read frequently the law that Moses had set down from God. And it's interesting that the counsel of God starts with a warning that Joshua was to be careful.

He was to act with care and diligence to ensure that he did all according to the law. To do so without turning from it. I wonder how many times he remembered in his early life of how the people turned from God's word.

[19 : 10] He disobeyed the law and suffered as a result. Not for him, I'm sure, was his commitment. And for this people on the verge of God's blessing.

God gives him three things in verse 8 that he needs to do in order to guide this people forward. The law was not to depart from his mouth. He was to talk about it.

This would be a means of ensuring that the people stayed occupied with God's thoughts and God's ways. Isn't it interesting? Every time he opened his mouth, God's word came out.

I wish that was true for me. Secondly, he was to meditate on it day and night. He was to think about it constantly. He was to chew it over. Because certainly in order to talk about it and apply it, he had to know it and had to see how it applied in his life.

And thirdly, he was to do everything written in it. He was to conduct his life in obedience to all of its commands. Good old Warren Wiersbe, the American theologian, who's written lots of wee commentaries on the Bible that are great to read.

[20 : 23] He observed that the secret of Joshua's victories was not his skill with a sword, but his submission to the word of God, to the God of the word.

Now, this point surely doesn't need to be made. And yet I know from my own life how little time I make really for God's word. And even when I know what God's word says to me, how often I think, well, I know better.

And I go off in my own kind of direction. Not for Joshua. Firmly rooted in the word God had given to him. And it's the same for you and I.

Never depart. Please, never depart. From the word God has given to us. And here's the fourth thing and the final thing. They are to go with the presence of God.

This first part of this chapter and all these promises and exhortations, they're framed by that repeated promise in verse 5 and verse 9. I'm with you wherever you go.

[21 : 29] Now, these people had known, hadn't they, times when God's presence was obvious. The cloud by day, the fire by night, the tabernacle, all of that stuff. They also knew times when his presence was withdrawn because of their sin and their disobedience.

Now they had the promise of the ever watchful and protective presence of God. No situation, no problem, no enemy they are going to face on their own.

He would be there always, constantly supporting and supplying. I want to say to you, if you're concerned about your life or an aspect of your life, or you're concerned about your family or your ministries or anything else, we can be absolutely sure God is infinitely more concerned about it than we are.

And our need is simply to walk in the light of his presence, to count on his guidance, his support, his supply, and his care by keeping our focus on him.

Now again, so many promises in Scripture that God is with us, but think of the very last one on the words of Jesus, as he, as it were, left earth for him. What did he say?

[22 : 42] I am with you always, even to the end of the age, and yet you and me think it's up to us. We've got to do this Christian life thing on our own.

We forget God's promise. Now, it's easy to be trite with that promise, and sadly I suspect many of us in our Christian lives are too self-obsessed to realize the presence of God.

Far less than the words of Brother Lawrence, that great monk from a few hundred years ago, and he would have exhorted us to practice the presence of God. But when we take God at his word, when we do arise and go, we will move into all that he has promised, and we will know his presence with us.

Of course, God is saying to these people, I'm taking you somewhere different. You're leaving the desert, and it's always great to leave the desert. God sometimes takes us into the desert.

Of course, he took Jesus into the desert, but he never wants us to stay there. Because God always wants to take us into his blessing. Arise, cross, stop trusting yourself.

[23 : 57] He's saying to them, trust me and move out. Take possession of all that I have given you. For you, that might be a new relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It may be a deeper relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It may be a challenge into service, or into some new activity that you've been resisting, perhaps.

God is saying to you, arise and go, and I will go with you. But it's important we take the warnings of Scripture.

So turn with me in your Bibles to Hebrews 4. The anonymous writer of this particular book, reflecting on Moses, also reflects on Joshua in chapter 4, where he talks in verses 8 and 9, actually of the danger of missing out again.

Now, if you're a student of the Old Testament, you'll know the people didn't miss out. They fought like Belial, won the land, and a few hundred years later, lose it all because of faithlessness and disobedience.

[25 : 03] Let us, therefore, verse 11, strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

What a warning to us, isn't it? Many of your friends and mine, of course, are in danger of missing out on God's blessing, God's rest.

But I want to suggest you it's also a danger we too may miss out on. That fullest and richest of God's blessings because we never quite took him at his word.

We let our fears win or we never allowed God to really deal with our sin. And so we fail to enter. Let's not rest now.

Let's arise and go into all that God has promised to us as he would bless us, confident that one day in his final and full blessings there will be a rest and there will be life eternal.

[26 : 11] May God bless his word to us this morning. Let's pray together. Father God, how much we have to thank you for that so often escapes our lips.

We forget that you're with us all the time. We get bogged down in our own problems and our own anxieties and our own worries. We miss out on the future you really have for us.

And so, Father, this morning as we thought a little bit about Joshua and the challenge you gave him and his people, you're giving to us in a sense. What is it you're calling us to do?

What are you bringing to us? Help us, Father, to be those who, with confidence, not in our own abilities, not in our own strength, but in the strength that you supply to take possession of all that you are blessing us with.

We ask this on individuals here, but also on the fellowship here at Brunsfield too. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.