

## *“Courageous Strength”*

(Joshua 1-24)

### **Moses 2.0 (Joshua)**

[Blow Horn]

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

Good news, after many years of slavery and then after 40 years wandering in the wilderness, God’s people have finally made it to the Promised Land...again! But this time, they’re ready to go in. This time is different. The book of Joshua describes how the people courageously entered the land and then distributed the land among the tribes of Israel.

But, to put it lightly, this is not the easiest story to swallow, especially for those of us who are committed to Jesus’ way of peace and loving enemies, not killing them. So what do we do with Joshua, this text of terror? Do we throw it out because it doesn’t fit our understandings of who God is or who Jesus calls us to be? Or, are we willing to wrestle with this text and learn what it has to teach us even today?

My hope is that we do not throw out or ignore this great story. My hope is that we can take it seriously and **allow these stories of conquest and covenant to shape our imaginations for being courageous followers of Jesus today.**

With that being said, let us first review the key parts of the story of Joshua. The book begins with the people on the East side of the Jordan before God calls them to cross the River. The Priests then carried the ark of the covenant into the middle of the river, the people walked across on dry land, and then Joshua piled up 12 stones as a memorial for the 12 Tribes of Israel to remember how God had miraculously provided a way for them into the Land.

The people then celebrated the Passover, a reminder of their journey from slavery and landlessness to freedom and inheritance of the Promised Land. After that very day they began eating the produce of the land. God’s provision of manna had come every morning throughout their long trek through the wilderness. But manna came to an end that day because the people now had plenty of food to eat in this new place.

After that first Passover in the Promised Land, the people of Israel fought several interesting battles as they took possession of the Land:

- In the battle of Jericho, God had an unorthodox strategy. For 6 days, seven priests marched around the city one time each day blowing trumpets and leading the ark of the covenant and all the people. Then on the seventh day after walking around the city seven times, all the people gave a loud shout and the walls came tumbling down!

- In the first battle against the people of Ai, the Israelites were defeated because of Achan's sin, which we don't have time to get into. But, in their second battle against Ai, the Israelites were victorious by using a tricky ambush technique, as directed by God.
- In another battle, God held the sun up in the sky much longer than normal to give the Israelites the edge for victory.
- Other battles were preceded by God sending hornets ahead of the people.

In each of these stories, the focus is not on killing enemies, but rather on trusting God. The people had to learn to courageously trust God wholeheartedly. After all, God was the one who fought the battles for them. Without God, the people could not have won.

But alas, even after many battles, the Israelite people did not conquer the whole land. When Joshua was old, there was still much land to be taken. Yet even so, God instructed Joshua to divide the whole land as an inheritance to the tribes of Israel, which is exactly what he did.

Finally, after all the land had been divided, Joshua spoke to all of Israel and affirmed to them again that it was not them who won the battles, but God who had fought for them. As a response to God giving them the Promised Land, Joshua exhorted the people to hold fast to God and not break God's covenant.

Then Joshua recounted the story of God calling, saving, and journeying with the Israelites all the way back from Abraham until the present day. After reciting their story again, Joshua left the people with these challenging words:

“Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. **But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.**” (Joshua 24:14-15)

When Joshua said these words, the people replied immediately: We also will serve God! After all, it was God who delivered us from slavery and drove out the people ahead of us!

The people had a choice that day, they could have turned away from the covenant right then and there, but they chose life, they chose to stick with God's covenant, to be God's people and to serve God alone as their God. Once again, the covenant is what brought together a diverse group of people and helped to unify them as one people serving one God.

With the covenant having been renewed once again, Joshua sent the people away to their inheritances before he died.

You see, this is a powerful story of Joshua leading the people into the Promised Land, following God faithfully and trusting God to win the battles for them. This is a story of courage and strength. This is the story of the next generation of Israelites affirming their loyalty in the living God. This is the story of Joshua continuing the story of Moses.

When we consider the person of Joshua, we might think of him as a second Moses, as Moses 2.0 if you will.

Joshua actually relived the story of Moses in many significant ways.

- Moses led the people across the Red Sea; Joshua led the people across the Jordan River.
- Moses celebrated the first Passover with the people before leaving Egypt; Joshua celebrated the first Passover with the people after entering the Promised Land.
- Moses led the people into covenant relationship with God at Mt. Sinai; Joshua renewed the covenant at Mt. Ebal.
- Moses led the people through the wilderness; Joshua led the people through the Promised Land.
- Moses renewed the covenant with the people in the land of Moab just before they entered the Promised Land; Joshua led the people in renewing the covenant again at Shechem after they had conquered much of the Promised Land and received their inheritance.

Joshua was Moses 2.0, reliving, reinterpreting Moses' story; always reminding the people of their covenant with the living God. This is what made both of these leaders great. They did not rely on their own strength, but rather relied on God's strength and pointed the people back into covenant relationship with the living God.

The covenant, that's the reason for all of these stories, from Egypt all the way into the Promised Land and beyond. The covenant is what brought a diverse group of people together into relationship with the one true God. The covenant required the people to courageously trust God all along the way and not turn away from God. That's why the people stop along the way to renew the covenant in each new generation, because the covenant is what held the people together in relationship with God.

And it is the same covenant that holds us together today. We are still people of God's covenant. We are still people who embrace God's 11 words spoken at Mt. Sinai beginning with the word of Grace: "I am the Lord Your God who brought you out of Egypt out of the Land of slavery" and followed by those words that teach us to be authentically human: "therefore have no other gods before me; don't make idols; don't misuse the name of God; observe the Sabbath day; honor your parents; don't murder; don't commit adultery; don't steal; don't bear false witness; don't covet." That's the covenant. The story of Joshua is a story of God's covenant people sticking with God along the way, trusting God to win the battles for them so that they can receive their inheritance.

## Moses/Joshua 3.0 (Jesus)

But still, what do we do with all the violence? As followers of Jesus, how can we embrace such a violent text describing battle and warfare?

Well, just as Joshua could be considered Moses 2.0, when we consider the story of Jesus, we might think of him as one who relives both the stories of Moses and Joshua. Consider these interesting connections:

- Moses led the people out of slavery in Egypt; Jesus led the people out of slavery to sin.
- Moses and Joshua led the people across bodies of water into new lands of freedom and promise; Jesus leads people through the waters of baptism into new life.
- Moses and Joshua covenanted with the 12 tribes of Israel on significant mountains; Jesus called 12 disciples while up on a mountain, therefore calling a renewed people of Israel.
- Moses and Joshua taught the people how to live God's way of life; Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, teaching God's new way of life, reframing many lessons from the Old Testament, including turning hate for enemies into love and saying that God's children would be peacemakers.
- Moses and Joshua celebrated the Passover with the people at significant moments in their journey, reminding them of the exodus; Jesus also celebrated the Passover with his Disciples, inviting them to remember not only the original Exodus but also the new Exodus.
- Joshua led the people in battle to conquer the Promised Land; Jesus leads people in battle to transform the world into God's Kingdom here on Earth.

Jesus is Moses and Joshua 3.0. Jesus teaches us not to forget the stories from the past, but rather to reinterpret them according to God's fullest revelation. Jesus' life and teaching makes so much more sense when we understand it as the continuation of the lives and teachings of Moses and Joshua as well as other key figures from the Old Testament.

No, God does not call us today to take up arms and physically fight against other people. But as followers of Jesus, God does call us to be strong and courageous in claiming God's kingdom on earth, which is breaking into existence all around us.

A couple weeks ago, I invited us to pull out our heavenly binoculars and scope out the Kingdom of God. That's the first step, learning to notice where God is at work in our world bringing healing and peace. We can notice God at work in the beauty of creation and in the joy of close relationships with friends and family. But God is most clearly seen in stories of hope and reconciliation, where there once was hopelessness and pain. That's where God is at work.

And we must notice where God is at work around us to restore broken relationships, but we must not stop with simply noticing God at work. Rather, as people in covenant relationship with the living God, we must be strong and courageous in joining God at work!

Jesus is a new Joshua who leads us into battle! Because there is much in our world that needs defeating: cycles of physical abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, racism, pornography, sexism, consumerism, and much more. These kinds of dangerous cycles are present in our own lives and in the lives of those around us. So my question for us is this: How can you courageously combat these kinds of cycles? How can you shine forth glimpses of God's grace? How can you follow God into these kinds of battles, trusting that God will win the battle and bring you safely to the other side? One thing is for sure, this will take much courage and strength.

[Blow Horn]

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“Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:14-15)

Therefore as followers of Jesus, may we choose to serve God alone. May we notice God at work in our midst. And may we courageously follow Jesus into the battles all around us, trusting that God is fighting for us and will bring us safely into the new Promised Land, God's Kingdom of Shalom. Amen.