

Joshua
Joshua 1:1-9; 24:13-31

Introduction

Sometimes Joshua is overshadowed by his great predecessor, Moses, and his true qualities are never truly seen in their own right. Yet Joshua was truly one of the great men of God. In preparation for the time when he was to succeed Moses, he was apprenticed to Moses, daily serving him and living with him in the Tabernacle. During this period he was also the companion of Caleb, who “wholly followed the Lord”. These two were the only ones among the adults of Israel who arrived in the Promised Land.

At the end of forty years of wandering, Palestine was in sight, and on Moses’ death, Joshua assumed command. We are not going to go into the details of the miraculous crossing of the Jordan, or the fall of the city of Jericho and the conquest of the land and its partitioning among the twelve tribes. We are interested in the position of Joshua when he had first assumed command and was about to lead the people into the unknown Promised Land. At the commencement of this great enterprise, we are reminded that he was merely an instrument in the hand of God.

Imagine his state of mind. There were unknown enemies, and his own people could not always be relied upon for they were rebellious. Moses had had plenty of trouble with them. Joshua himself was inexperienced, and everything was a complete mystery. He must have known fear, uncertainty and lack of confidence. God gave him two things – command and promises for success. The same is true today when men are called to service – which is fulltime for everyone!

God’s command to Joshua

God set out Joshua’s work before him, and promised him complete success in his enterprise. The land would be given in its entirety. No one would withstand. But this was only if Joshua resigned himself to be the Lord’s servant and come under His total authority.

The work is God’s. Men are only instruments. God uses them to achieve His purposes – but only if His position of authority is recognized.

Obedience requires courage. **Be strong and very courageous** (Joshua 1:7). This gives the lie to the strange notion that walking with God is the soft option – that religion is for old women and children. It requires the highest practical courage, and strong men who are prepared to stand alone with their face against the stream. Manliness, courage, backbone are required by the man who walks in obedience to God.

For Joshua, obedience meant facing immeasurable difficulties – besieged cities, walled up to heaven, whose warriors were in chariots of iron, armed with scythes, intrigues by subtle foes, let down by those whom he trusted, facing one confederation

of kings after another. His task meant long years of perseverance. It was not done in a day, or a year, but it was a life-long enterprise. To go on after the first flush of enthusiasm has passed, to press on during days of discouragement, requires courage of the highest order. It's not just about beginning, but continuing.

At the start of any enterprise there is plenty of enthusiasm and willing hands. But does that continue? The interest cools off, many prove that they are not "stickers", and cannot remain faithful year after year.

Obedience must also be exact. **That thou mayest observe to do according to all the law** (Joshua 1:7). Joshua knew God's requirements from the Book of the Law. He spent his day and night in it, examining, meditating and learning from it. He had to be obedient to all that he had learnt in it. There was to be total and unwavering obedience.

As we examine the Word of God – which is far fuller than Joshua's Book of the Law – it is exact obedience which God requires. Who would tolerate a clerk keeping his accounts right to the nearest hundred? Are God's standards any less than the worlds?

The path of obedience is generally a middle path. Is always dangerous to hold an extreme position. So often in doctrine, some people are really strong on the Person of Christ, Deity and humanity, divine sovereignty, election and predestination. But they are blind to all else, neglecting other parts of Scripture, or distorting them or twisting them. Hence they neglect men's responsibility and free agency. The path to truth is to hold both together. Take all that is in the Bible. Our creed must bend to the Bible, not vice versa. Better to be inconsistent with ourselves than with God's revealed truth.

So also the danger of holding extreme positions is seen in our general conduct. Our speech – sometimes we fail here because we say too much or too little. Enthusiasm – some is foolish and unwise and tactless. Others are too cowardly and cautious. Faith – some are presumptuous and never examine themselves. Others are inconstant and doubt. Cheerfulness – some are all froth and levity. Others never smile. Even in our church work and daily callings, extremes are to be avoided. The path of obedience is generally the middle one.

God's promise to Joshua

As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee... the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:9). This promise of God's presence is never failing. It strengthens, undergirds, and raises the drooping spirits of Joshua. God would not let him down. He did not have to face life on his own. God would provide, guide and uphold.

This promise changed Joshua's outlook. The giants, dangers, walled cities, treacherous followers were still there. God did not promise anything about taking them out of the way. But He provided wisdom and courage. God did not take the problems away, but instead he made Joshua adequate.

There are many other examples of God's presence with people in need. Jacob had run for his life, and journeyed for years. God called him, **I am with thee and I will keep**

thee (Genesis 28:15). Moses was called to a momentous task – to deliver the children of Israel from the hands of Pharaoh and take them to the land flowing with milk and honey. **Certainly I will be with thee** (Exodus 3:12), promised God. Jeremiah was terrified out of his wits, but God promised **Be not afraid of their faces for I am with thee to deliver thee** (Jeremiah 1:8). And when Jesus gave the great commission to His disciples everywhere to evangelise the earth, He promised, **Lo I am with you always** (Matthew 28:20).

We are never alone. He is with us in every place and in every circumstance every day. During the working days and the waiting days, the perilous days and the peaceful days, the glad days and the sad days, in birth and in death. The Lord loves us too much to leave us. We are so dear to Him, that we are never alone, never without a helper. And this continues year after year. **Even to your old age, I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you** (Isaiah 46:4). **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Romans 8:35,38,39).

Live in God's presence every day. Keep your mind on Him. Cultivate His presence. Bring Him into all your calculations. Bring your worries, fears, trials and distressing situations into the presence of Him who says, "I will be with you". Never see God through the difficulties; instead, see the difficulties through God.

Conclusion

Joshua was one in a succession of soldiers who successfully performed their duties because they were devoted servants of God. They were ruled by the fear of the Lord, conscious of His divine call, putting themselves at His disposal. C.f. Oliver Cromwell, who began all his great enterprises with prayer; General Gordon, who kept on his wall the reminder "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He will direct thy paths". So with Joshua, he learnt that obedience based on instruction from the Law of the Lord was to be precise and exact, and required great courage. He held onto God's promise of never failing presence and help.

The application to our own lives is clear. For those whose lives are given to the Lord, but are maybe cast down by the worries of the day – take fresh courage. So often we expect things to happen overnight. Remember that many great movements in the work of the Lord were dependent on long, lonely, dreary and apparently unrewarded sowing and praying years beforehand. Francke, who founded the Halle Orphanage, recorded, "I thought when I committed myself to God by faith I had only to pray when I had need, and supplies would come, but I found I had sometimes to wait and pray for a long time".

We need to learn to "Work as though all depends on us. Then trust God knowing that all depends on Him." Stick at it, work hard, trust in God, and we shall not fail.

For those who are unsaved. How often there will be times when you will want the presence of God who does not fail or forsake. But God's promises are conditional.

Remember Joshua's last words; **Choose you this day whom you will serve** (Joshua 24:15).