

## THE LORD'S CHARGE FOR JOSHUA

Joshua 1:1-9

— **Intro:** The Lord's charge to Joshua as he took over the leadership of the children of Israel, is stated three times in the first nine verses of Joshua 1. It is, "Be strong and of a good courage." That is the positive statement. The third time the Lord said it He added, "Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed."

This was not the first time that Joshua had heard these words. Turn back to Deut. 31 and you will find that Moses gave this same charge to all of the nation in verse 6, and then he repeated it to Joshua in verse 7, and followed it up with verse 8.

So strength and courage were needed by all of the people of God, and also by their leader.

The negatives in Deut. 31:6 and 8, as well as the negatives in Joshua 1:9 help us to understand what is meant by "be strong and of a good courage," or, as we read in Joshua 1:7, "very courageous." It means that they were not to be afraid, nor dismayed (see Joshua 1:9).

— By definition a courageous person is brave, is bold, fearless, confident. And when you apply this to a child of God, it means *faith*.

There is not a child of God that we read about in the Scriptures who did not need such an exhortation. Moses certainly needed strength and courage, or he never would have been able to go before Pharaoh the way he did. David was in constant need of courage and strength in his dealings with Saul. We saw in our SS lesson this morning that when David and his men got back to Ziklag and found that the Amalekites had destroyed it by fire and had taken the women and children away, his own men were ready to stone him. So what did he do? 1 Sam. 30:6 tells us that "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." He was looking to the Lord for the strength and courage that he needed in that dark hour to do the right thing in that crisis. And that was just one of many times that David turned to the Lord for the strength and courage to continue.

— Think of Daniel when the decree went out from King Darius that no one was to petition any God or man for thirty days, but only the king. That story is in Daniel 6. Prior to that we read of Daniel's three friends who refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image even though they knew

that refusal to do so would land them in the burning fiery furnace. It took a great deal of strength and courage to do what they did.

— When we go into the NT, Peter is an example of failure in this regard. He denied with oaths before young women that he even knew the Lord. But then we see later how he and John continued to preach even though they were told by the authorities that they were not to do it.

The life of Paul is full of examples where he needed strength and courage to be faithful. As one example I think of what he wrote in the last chapter of his last epistle. I am referring to what we read in 2 Tim. 4:14-18:

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:

15 Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.

16 At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.

17 Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

— 18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Now all of those, and others that I could cite, are among the major crises that we read about in Scripture. But when you bring it down to the lives we live every day, you can see that we are constantly in need of strength and faith. Let me illustrate.

— When we come together here at church, it is easy to talk about the Lord. We are with each other. We know the Lord, and love the Lord. And it is easy to talk about the things of the Lord. But when we go our separate ways, and we find ourselves in the company of people, for some of you it would be even at home, but surely among people we work with or do business with, our neighbors with whom we freely talk about the weather, or politics, or sports, there we find it very difficult to talk about the Lord. Sometimes Christians can be very brazen by nature, and are offensive in our approach, and drive people away by their overbearing ways. That is not the strength and courage that we need. In such cases more harm is done than good. I am not speaking of that kind of boldness. No one should be more gracious than a Christian. We ought always to be loving

in our approach to others. But I am talking about standing up for the truth or bearing testimony to the Gospel when a door is wide open, but somehow we find it difficult to get the Word out. It is easier to talk about almost anything, but it is different when it comes to the Gospel. You can fill in the details from your own life because I am sure that you know what I am talking about. It may even be easier to take our stand in a crisis than it is to talk to a single person about his or her need of Christ.

Let us look at this passage in Joshua 1 to see how the Lord approached this subject of strength and courage with Joshua in those early days when Joshua had been promoted to the place that Moses had formerly had.

So let us start with the question:

## **I. WHY WOULD JOSHUA HAVE ANY INCLINATION TO BE AFRAID?**

Let us look for a reason in verse 1, and there is a reason there.

### **A. Joshua had been perfectly content to be “Moses’ minister.”**

I can’t think of a single instance in Joshua’s life where he had been a problem to Moses. He loved Moses. He was dedicated to doing all that he could to help Moses. He was the one who led the forces of Israel victoriously against Amalek. He was one of two who brought back a good report after he accompanied the other spies who went into the land. He must have been a great encouragement to Moses all through those years of wandering in the desert, and he always stood by Moses. *But there is nothing to indicate that he was ambitious to take over Moses’ job. He was content to be Moses’ minister.* The word “minister” means that he was totally devoted to Moses, and nothing made him happier than to do even the most menial tasks which Moses might ask him to do. Joshua was indeed a man in whom God had done an amazing work. You don’t find many men like Joshua.

Now when you are perfectly happy doing what you are doing, it can be very disturbing to be asked to do something else, especially if it should mean more responsibility.

But there was a second reason why this was a trying time for Joshua.

### **B. “Moses my servant is dead” (Joshua 1:2).**

— It might now have been so bad if Moses had been around so that Joshua could go to him for advice and help, but that was impossible. Moses was dead! For years Joshua had worked for and with Moses, but now that was no longer possible. He would be in Moses' place without Moses, and that had to be disturbing to Joshua. I don't mean that Joshua was afraid to stand on his own two feet, but if you had had the fellowship that those two men had enjoyed together, you would have known that no one in Israel felt the loss of Moses more than Joshua did.

But I think of a third reason, and it also is in verse 2.

### **C. "This people."**

Joshua was under no illusion as to what the people were like. Time and time again he had seen Moses fall on his face before God because of the sins and rebellion of the people. You could almost count on the fact that they would not want to do what the Lord wanted them to do. In spite of how gracious the Lord had been with His people, forgiving them time and time again, yet their rebellion continued. And so the word, "this people," would have had an ominous, discouraging ring in the ears of Joshua.

— Let me mention one more discouragement, or problem, that Joshua had to face. This also is in verse 2.

### **D. "The land."**

It is easy for us to read about the Canaanites, knowing what the outcome was, and yet underestimating the great problem that the children of Israel faced in going into "the land."

Ten out of twelve spies came back saying with Caleb and Joshua, that it was all that the Lord said it would be, a land flowing with milk and honey. But they also said that they far outnumbered the children of Israel. They spoke of their high walls which surrounded many of their cities. And they knew that they were not a backward people, but were advanced in their civilization, cultured, and trained to defend their land with all of the power they could muster—and that was plenty! Humanly speaking the ten spies were right: there was no way that Israel could go in and take possession of the land of Canaan!

— But now let us look at the other side of the coin, so to speak:

## II. WHAT DID THE LORD SAY THAT GAVE JOSHUA THE STRENGTH AND COURAGE, THE FAITH, TO ACCEPT SUCH AN ASSIGNMENT?

— First,

### A. He was given the promises of God.

Look at them beginning with verse 2 and going down through verse 5.

Note that the emphasis in verses 2 and 3 is not that the Israelites were going to *take* the land, but that God was going to *give* it to them. In fact, verse 3 indicates that *the Lord had already given it to them!* And the dimensions of the territory are stated in verse 4 so there would be no question in Joshua's mind as to what "the land" was.

But we have some more promises in verse 5.

No man would be able to stand against them. If the land had been full of giants, that was no problem for the Lord.

— And then in verse 5 also Joshua had this promise: "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee." Joshua knew what that meant more than we can realize it now. Joshua had seen many nations when the whole nation was against Moses, and when their circumstances were hopeless, and yet the Lord always stood by Moses. But Moses did not have exclusive rights to the blessing of God; God would be just as faithful to Joshua as He had been to Moses. And so the Lord added, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." The Lord was not asking Joshua to guarantee the project; God is the One Who would grant them the victory.

If Joshua had nothing more than what we read down through verse 5, that would have been sufficient. But that was not all. Beginning with verse 6 and going through verse 9 we read:

### B. THE CHARGE.

— Three times it is stated. This shows how tremendously important the charge was, and how much Joshua needed to remember that strength and courage were his primary needs as the leader of the nation Israel, strength and courage to believe God, to obey God, and to be an encouragement to the people of Israel.

The first one is in verse 6.

**1. The Lord's guarantee that the task would not fail.**

— God had not only given His promise, but He had confirmed it with His oath. He spoke of “the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them.”

The second shows where they needed to be strong, and where that strength would come from.

**2. Their need to be “strong and very courageous” in obeying the Word of God (Joshua 1:7-8).**

What do these verses mean if they do not indicate that our strength and our courage come from obeying the Word, and from meditating upon the Word.

— I was speaking this morning about how we need to be reading the Word every day, and how we need to pray every day, turning back to the Lord what we find in the Word. Here the Lord gives us another very important thing that we need to do. *We need to meditate daily upon what we find in the Word.* It is when we think about what we have read, that the Holy Spirit makes the meaning clearer, and also makes it a part of our lives.

Finally,

**3. The need to remember Who it is Who has told us all that we are depending upon.**

— The Lord said, “Have not I commanded thee?” Earlier we read in Deut. 31 what Moses had said to the people about being strong and courageous. And then we saw that he told Joshua the same thing. But as had been repeatedly the case, Moses was the Lord's spokesman. These words had come from the Lord. They were His words. And He stood behind them. He would not change them, nor would He fail to keep them. Standing upon the Word of God, Joshua and all of the Israelites were on good ground. And the Lord's final word was, “For the Lord *thy* God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” And in this particular context this meant *wherever they went in the land.* Regardless of how high the walls might be, or however much they might be outnumbered, or regardless of the power that was at their disposal, the Lord would be with them, never

would He fail them, and they could always safely trust in Him.

**Concl:** Now, what does this do for us?

We learn from this that strength, spiritual strength, and courage, are our two greatest needs. And they are our continuing needs. When we get discouraged, we need to come back to the Word and to the Lord to be reminded of His faithfulness, and of His power, and His grace, and through examining our lives in the light of the Word, make sure that we are living the way the Lord wants us to live. And then to find strength day by day not only by reading the Word, but also by meditating on the Word. Then we will find that our way, too, will be spiritually prosperous, and then we will have “good success” in seeing the will of God carried out in our lives.