

The Choice of a New Generation | Deuteronomy

Are You Ready to Enter the Land?

Deuteronomy 31.7-8; Joshua 1.1-9

12.31.17

Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance.⁸ The Lord is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

Joshua 1 *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, ² "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. ³ "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. ⁴ "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. ⁵ "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. ⁶ "Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ "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. ⁸ "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. ⁹ "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."*

This is the final sermon in The Book of Deuteronomy ... at least for a while. I hope you enjoyed the series in this neglected book that ends with the death of Moses who was not allowed to take the Israelites into the Promised Land...a disappointment.

Today is a kind of pre-view of the series planned for NEXT FALL (Fall of 2018)... We hope, God willing, to look at The Book Joshua next fall and TODAY we get just a warm-up for next year...but also, I couldn't ignore the connection between OUR current situation and the end of Deuteronomy and the start of Joshua.

WE are facing a Brave New World...and a New Year and who knows what lies ahead? We're NOT entering the Promised Land but there IS a launch at the start of each new year...a new beginning and new goals and hopes...maybe some resolutions.

The charge to Joshua is, “be strong and courageous.” And, WE TOO... need strength and courage to meet what may come. And while TODAY we may be hopeful and excited to turn over a new leaf and charge ahead... THERE MAY ALSO BE A BIT OF ANXIETY and apprehension... maybe even some real dread. You may be facing some uncertainties, changes/challenges... And DO YOU HAVE, practically speaking, the inner resources to face the task?

Is this sermon a pep-talk? Well... sort of... a preview and a pep-talk but more than that... a kind of antidote to what faces us all from time to time...and faces some of us with crushing force: discouragement.

If DIS-couragement is a loss of heart (literal meaning) then how do we find “courage” and inner strength at the start of this launch/New Year’s Eve...and how do we stay encouraged in the face of anxiety/change and maybe great resistance in the coming year?

Let’s look at 1) The Call to Courage 2) The Reason for Courage and 3) The Practice of Courage in 2018

There’s an old fable about the devil selling his tools. And on the table are all these shiny vices and these polished temptations like lust and greed and gossip... but over to the side (NOT ON the table and NOT for sale)...was this battered, beaten-up wedge (like is used to split logs). It was over-used and it was the devil’s favorite tool – discouragement.

Other vices and weapons make people act in ways they will regret in time... but discouragement takes away all initiative and leaves people INactive...and unable to move.

We often hear that there are two basic responses to difficulty – fight or flight but there is a third – fight, flight or freeze... and discouragement makes a person frozen and paralyzed... and unable to act.

The word “courage” is (as Brené Brown reminds us) “Courage is a heart word. The root of the word courage is cor - the Latin word for heart.” In English we use “coronary” ...in Spanish, French and other languages, the same Latin root shows up... and to be discouraged is to lose heart...to sort of give up and give in... to lose the will to go on...to freeze.

We could all ask ourselves, “What is ONE area of my life or relationships or situation where I have lost heart and am sort of frozen... discouraged?”

At the start of this next book, Moses has now died and immediately Joshua, his successor, is activated.

His name means, “the LORD is salvation” and he’s been groomed for leadership for a long time. We first met him when the Israelites battled the Amelekites (Ex 17)... That was when Moses was

told to get up on a hill and lift his hands toward heaven. When his hands were raised, Israel would prevail against the enemy. When Moses dropped his hands, the Israelites began to fail. Joshua was in charge of the troops and he could see that “the battle belongs to the LORD” (1 Sam 17.47) ... Big lesson for Joshua whose name means “the LORD is salvation”.

Later, Joshua would go with Moses to this “tent of meeting” where Moses would pray and meet with God... And Joshua heard Moses say these BOLD words to the LORD, “If Your presence does not go with us...DO NOT LEAD US up from here...”

In other words, Moses sees it crystal clear (and Joshua is witness): “our national destiny depends on YOU, O LORD, being with us...If you don’t accompany us...we’re nothing and everything grinds to a halt... it all depends on YOU BEING WITH US!”

And then when Moses was about to die, Joshua goes again with Moses to that prayer tent...and the cloud of God’s presence comes down. And the people see it (that Joshua IS the successor!) AND Joshua sees once again – God’s presence is the ONE thing essential to our flourishing as a people...the only factor that really makes us different from the nations – God has decided to be WITH us...God’s presence is everything!

And now Joshua is called to take his solo flight...I’m sure even after all the ways he was taught by Moses and all the lessons he learned just by watching Moses... I’m sure Joshua was super-prepared... and still... more than a little...nervous. Why?

Because Moses sang this song at the end of Deuteronomy (CH 32) about how the people would fail but God would not. The people of the next generation would be pretty much like their parents, like the Exodus Generation who died in the wilderness... I’m sure Joshua HOPED that this second generation would be better ... but they were the same... every generation is basically the same.

And Joshua’s calling that gets repeated again and again, “Be strong and courageous” – it’s what the man needs who leads this obstinate people – “be strong and courageous.” It’s a figure of speech that uses two words to express ONE idea (e.g. sick and tired OR safe and sound OR wild and crazy) and what this leader needs...THE basic quality is to be stout of heart!

And the way the Bible works... the consistent METHOD is NEVER just to tell people how to live or what to do and that’s IT... NO! What Joshua gets and how God always commands is “Do THIS because of THAT”. Always a rationale!

It’s not “Hey Joshua! Be strong and courageous PERIOD!” No! Instead (and you’ll find this throughout the Bible) be strong and courageous because God has made promises that He WILL keep and because God is with you...is for you...on your side.

And that's what we read in this two-part text. It's what Joshua learned from Moses and consistently saw IN Moses...the Presence and the Promise...the Presence and the Promise...the Presence and the Promise.

"The LORD has sworn to give them this land...the LORD is the one who goes before you...He will not fail or forsake you...No man will be able to stand before you...I will not fail or forsake you...(last verse) Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go!"

Is it a matter of faith...of trusting God? YES!

Is it irrational and a leap into a baseless, illogical and absurd unknown? NO WAY! There's reason to trust.

And this is why it's so destructive when spiritual or religious people say things like, "You just gotta believe" and then they leave it at that.

No! We always ask, "Believe WHAT? Believe that everything is gonna work out? Believe in yourself? THAT'S NOT how the Bible works!"

We always ask, "What's the basis for this call to action?" And the Bible's answer is, "The promise and the presence." God promised to give this land and God is with us... THAT IS WHY JOSHUA CAN BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS.

Now as we look at our own lives... as we wonder what the New Year will bring... economically...and in your health...and in your relationships...and in your walk with God and in your vocation and in your own personal well-being and growth and IN US (as a congregation in service and in mission)... WE TOO, like Joshua are looking for a basis, a REASON why we should be ENCOURAGED (strong and courageous).

And people will tell you, "Aw, c'mon! You got this!" (as if, "you're a strong person" ...and THAT may be...but it's NOT the Bible's way) OR someone might say, "I feel really good about this year because the economy looks good" (AND, again, that might be the case but that too is NOT the Bible's way)... OR "It's gonna be a great year because I just believe..." (Once more: this is NOT the Bible's basic method!)

The reason for confidence that God is holding out to us is Joshua... i.e. the Greater Joshua, Yeshua... Many years after the life of the apprentice of Moses, Joshua son of Nun... there came another Joshua.

Jesus Christ, was named after THIS man... "You shall call His name Jesus because He will save his people from their sins..." His name, Jesus, in an Anglicized version of Joshua or Yeshua, "the LORD is salvation".

Jesus Christ IS the reason we can and must have courage. He, the Greater Joshua, has conquered the land FOR us... He is the General who represents all the people of God, everyone who rests in Him and His work. He is the greater Son of Moses who is the embodiment of all the promises of God: (Paul) "For as many as are the promises of God, in (Christ) they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us." (2 Cor 1.20)

In other words, HE is the basis for our approach to life; He is the ground/reason why we have confidence...and courage. Jesus Christ, the greater Joshua is our "en-couragement"

And He is not only the embodiment of the promises but also the substance of God's presence.

Moses said "If God is not with us...then we're frozen...we have no basis to go on..." So, is God with us...can we go on? Yes! Jesus Christ, the Son of God has fulfilled the calling of Joshua son of Nun... He kept the Law for us...subdued the Land for us...and promises to bring the Dark Continent of my heart into conformity with His will...to make my motives and words and behavior all that I was intended to be.

Jesus Christ, lived for me as my Champion...He died for my bad record and failings/sins... and He rose again to show that His sacrifice is accepted. This is why I can have courage... This is the reason why to be discouraged really doesn't make sense.

This is the ongoing basis/ground/foundation of the strong and courageous life to which God has called me...and to which God has called US.

Now the practice of this approach to life...the life that finds encouragement even in otherwise very discouraging circumstances is NOT about psyching yourself into it ("I think I can...I think I can...I know I can...I KNOW I CAN!") The Bible's answer is to say, "Joshua can...i.e. Yeshua can... Jesus Christ can and He did... He loved me and gave Himself for me... He lived, died and rose for me... He represented me and I am IN HIM (i.e. all that is His is now mine!)"

Does this mean that our economy will flourish and our personal incomes will soar...does it mean that I'll get better looking and healthier and more successful and people will like me in 2018...and all my wildest dreams will come true?

Of course not.

It means that the Land... the Dark Continent... my heart and motives will be subdued...little by little... The real Joshua/Yeshua is moving and taming the heart. That while outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we're being renewed day by day. (2 Cor 4.16)

That all things MUST work together for my good... (Romans 8.28) i.e. for my transformation into the beautiful image of Jesus Christ.

God loves me... and God likes me... When I look to Jesus Christ I see that clearly – the promises and the presence of God have been manifest in time and space... It's a historical reality I can trust.

Will I get discouraged sometimes?... Sure...none of us believe consistently and without interruption.

But when I do get frozen...and when I lose heart because my health wavers or fails or my job looks very rocky or my kids seem to be going off the rails or because I'm still not married...or still not sure what to do with my life... IT'S OK...

I come again ...and again and again and again... to the Greater Joshua and say, "Lord Jesus Christ, You lived and died for me...You have to take dominion over my wild, unruly heart and subdue it to Yourself..."

"YOU have to conquer my fears and discouragements because THEY'RE too much for me (Micah 7.19) ... Your name is salvation...so live up to that Name that's above every name and help me fix my mind on things above.

Show me the infinite riches that are MINE in YOU and BE THE REASON for strength and courage... knowing the good plans You have for me...the destiny...and life, life, eternal life.