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Trust, Obey, and Conquer: The Book of Joshua

Joshua 24:15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

***“Trust, Obey, and Conquer:
Introduction to the Book of
Joshua”***

June 3, 2012

Sermon Text: Joshua 1

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 10

Introduction-

Every Christian is facing a great battle. We are right in the middle of it. We live in enemy territory and we are laboring to advance and take that which Christ has given to us. But it is a real fight. The enemy does not yield easily. Yes, Christ has conquered. Yes, Satan is a defeated foe, but he is still a foe and he rages against Christ and the people of Christ in intense fury:

Revelation 12:9-13 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our

God. (11) And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (12) Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! **But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"** (13) And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

Satan hates Christ. He hates the people of Christ. He hates the gospel and the truth of Christ. And he is tireless in his efforts to destroy. Paul describes this enemy force that we are up against:

Ephesians 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. (11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (12) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (13) Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. (14) Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and

having put on the breastplate of righteousness, (15) and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. (16) In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; (17) and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, (18) praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...

What Christian has not grown weary at times? We thought, didn't we, that we would profess Christ, tell our friends and families and strangers about Him, and people would, perhaps not in huge numbers, but some – would believe in Christ and we would see their lives instantly transformed while heaven's choirs sang hallelujahs? But it turns out that the battle is much harder won than that. We plead with people to come to Christ. We pray for them – for years. And every so often one might show promising signs. Another might make a profession of Christ and be baptized, become a church member, and...there!

But then many fall away. You hear this in Paul's letter to the Philippians:

Philippians 1:27-30 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel

of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are **standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, (28) and not frightened in anything by your opponents.** This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. (29) For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, (30) engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

And again:

Philippians 3:16-19 Only let us hold true to what we have attained. (17) Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. (18) **For many**, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. (19) Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

It is a tough fight. Every step is hard-won. You know what it is like to be discouraged. Those flaming darts get fired at us. We are misunderstood. We find ourselves alienated from family and others who once were close to us.

We are maligned and considered to be fools.

Sometimes, we just need a pep-talk. We need to be reminded of the fundamentals of how to follow Christ and how to fight the battle He has called us to. That is what the book of Joshua is. A general rallying his troops as they set out to take what the Lord has given them. They are going to blunder, and suffer for it. They are going to experience some great victories and some times of incredible confusion and dismay. But always they are called back to their fundamental battle plan:

Trust, Obey, and Conquer

I am not in the most victorious, celebratory era of my life right now. The battle has been tough and it doesn't seem to be getting any easier. It is no pleasant thing to see people who once professed Christ now walking as enemies of the cross. And it isn't easy to see battle weary troops discouraged and ready to pack it in. We all need a rallying call to counter fear and dismay. The book of Joshua is that call:

Joshua 1:5-9 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. (6) Be strong and

courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. (7) Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good 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 good success. (9) Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

So this book of Joshua is about warfare. It is about God's battle strategy for victory. It is a warning of what not to do. Like Joshua and his people, we have enemies to fight. We have a Land to enter into. And God's battle plan has not changed.

But This is the Old Testament?

How do we apply the book of Joshua to our own situation? Some people might argue that there really is no direct application, just some general, broad principles. But the New Testament shows us that the Scriptures

of the Old Testament are indeed profitable for the man of God. Let me show you just a couple of examples.

A. Written for Our Instruction

We have already heard Paul's words to the church at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 10:1-6 For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, (2) and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, (3) and all ate the same spiritual food, (4) and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. (5) Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (6) **Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.**

And:

1 Corinthians 10:11-12 **Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (12) Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.**

Pretty plain, right? We acknowledge the perseverance of the saints. We do

not believe that a person who is truly in Christ can ever be separated from Him. And yet, the New Testament contains many of these kinds of warnings to all people who profess to belong to Christ. To people who have been baptized in His name. To people who have eaten His bread and who have drunk His cup. Be careful. Don't make the same mistakes those Israelites did, or you will perish in the wilderness too.

The book of Hebrews also issues such warnings to us:

Hebrews 3:5-19 Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, (6) but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. (7) **Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, (9) where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. (10) Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' (11) As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" (12) Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall**

away from the living God. (13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (15) As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? (17) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? (19) **So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.**

Hebrews 4:1-2 **Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. (2) For good news came to us just as to them,** but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

So we can confidently take the book of Joshua and apply it to our situation today. Of course, in doing so, we must permit Scripture to tell us what the "Rest" is that we are entering, and

what it means to do battle, and what the nature of our enemy is.

B. Joshua's "Rest" and Ours (Hebrews 4)

Let me show you still another passage in Hebrews that refers directly to Joshua, and connects the "Rest" we are entering with the "Rest" that Joshua and Israel were entering.

Hebrews 4:1-13 **Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.** (2) For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. (3) For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. (4) For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." (5) And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest." (6) **Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience,** (7) again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his

voice, do not harden your hearts." (8) **For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.** (9) So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, (10) for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. (11) **Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.** (12) For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (13) And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

So we can learn much about the "Rest" into which we are looking forward to by studying the "Rest" that Joshua was striving to enter, and how many of his people failed to enter it because of hard-hearted unbelief and disobedience.

If I am not mistaken, I believe that there is a movement afoot today in some reformed circles to discount the specific applicability of OT Scripture, like Joshua, to our personal situations today. I am not extremely familiar with it, but it seems to say that our purpose in preaching and teaching Scripture, and I assume particularly in

the OT Scriptures, is to simply show people how a book like Joshua fits into God's overall plan and history of redemption, but to avoid making specific, personal application. However, it seems to me that this is precisely what the NT does in passages such as 1 Cor 10 and repeatedly in the book of Hebrews. Yes, we must consider the fact that in the New Covenant, the Law of God is written upon our hearts rather than on stone. But, once more, the author of Hebrews says that this actually "ups the ante" rather than diminishing it –

Hebrews 2:1-3 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (2) For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, (3) how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard...

So, there it is. We can come to the book of Joshua and, with confidence:

- Find Christ in it, learning how God was continuing to carry out His plan of redemption in Christ in the days of Joshua, and
- Draw specific applications for our own experience in following Christ.

- Warnings, encouragements, etc.

We simply need to be certain however that our applications to our own lives are truly drawn from the real truths that Scripture is teaching. If we fail to do that, then we will distort the message of Scripture and end up in a kind of mere moralistic "today's lesson" approach. Listen Woudstra explain this [The New International Commentary on the Old Testament]-

"The common 'Bible story approach,' replete with moral lessons taken out of context, inevitably leads to widespread moralism....thus the example method effectively cuts us off from the true scriptural meaning of books such as Joshua. Morality becomes the watchword. But morality cannot save. Only when it is woven into the fabric of redemption and flows from the redemptive work which God accomplishes for His people can morality receive its due."

Many, many Sunday School lessons fail at this point. When Joshua and the Israelites marched around Jericho and the walls came tumbling down, what was really happening? The moralistic SS approach makes the message fundamentally about man – about Joshua and the people. But the emphasis in Scripture is always about God and what He is doing. So all of our application must begin with God

and flow out of His character and His actions. Not *Joshua and the people obeyed God and believed Him and so God did a miracle for them*. No. It is rather something more like – *God, in His mighty power, cannot be opposed by His enemies. All that stands against His purpose of salvation and redemption is going to come down. He brings those who obey Him into His Rest, the New Creation.*

And I suppose this would be another way of describing correct interpretation and application of Scripture: *Scripture speaks of the here and now, but always points us to the there and then. The Rest that Joshua brought the people into is not an end in itself. It points us to that Rest which awaits us and which is eternal, not temporal.* For example:

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:14-16 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are

seeking a homeland. (15) If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. (16) But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

The Days of Joshua

The days of Moses had come to an end. Deuteronomy ends with the account of his death and with the Lord's appointment of Joshua as his successor. Talk about shoes to fill!

Deuteronomy 31:1-8 So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel. (2) And he said to them, "I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in. The LORD has said to me, 'You shall not go over this Jordan.' (3) The LORD your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them, and Joshua will go over at your head, as the LORD has spoken. (4) And the LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. (5) And the LORD will give them over to you, and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. (6) Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread

of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you." (7) Then Moses summoned 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 that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. (8) It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

Now, here is one great difference between Joshua's experience and ours:

Deuteronomy 31:14-23 And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, the days approach when you must die. Call Joshua and present yourselves in the tent of meeting, that I may commission him." And Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the tent of meeting. (15) And the LORD appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud. And the pillar of cloud stood over the entrance of the tent. (16) And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. **Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them. (17) Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my**

face from them, and they will be devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' (18) And I will surely hide my face in that day because of all the evil that they have done, because they have turned to other gods. (19) "Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel. (20) **For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are full and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant.** (21) And when many evils and troubles have come upon them, this song shall confront them as a witness (for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring). **For I know what they are inclined to do even today, before I have brought them into the land that I swore to give."** (22) So Moses wrote this song the same day and taught it to the people of Israel. (23) And the LORD commissioned Joshua the son of Nun and said, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them. I will be with you."

Under the Old Covenant, hearts were unchanged. Yes, there was always the real remnant. But external circumcision was not the circumcision of the heart that makes a true Jew. And this was the outcome. Failure. Going after idols. This was their fundamental *inclination*. In contrast, in the New Covenant, this is the expectation and reality:

Jeremiah 31:31-34 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, (32) not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. (33) But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (34) And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

The reason warnings are given to us in the New Testament – warnings that we

have seen this morning in 1 Cor 10 and in Hebrews for example – are given because:

1. True Israelites, the true people of Christ, need to put off the old flesh and put on the new man, living in agreement with who they truly are, and
2. To warn those in the visible church who profess to be Christians but who are not.

But in Christ, this is the order of the day-

Romans 8:1-4 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (3) For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, (4) in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Joshua then is the new leader as Moses passes off the scene. It is his task to lead the people into the land and all they have to do is trust, obey and conquer. That's all. (Remember, all of that first generation who came out of Egypt had died, except for Joshua

and Caleb). So it would seem that someone should have learned something!

Who wrote this book? It is named for the primary character of the book, Joshua, whose name means “The Lord is Salvation.” In the Greek translation of the OT (LXX), Joshua is translated as Iesous.

Matthew 1:21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

There is much disagreement as to the specific authorship of the book and regarding the date of its writing. If the original Exodus from Egypt occurred in 1400 then these events in Joshua would be sometime after that first generation had died off in the wilderness.

Trusting and Obeying Requires Courage

Consider how many times this phrase occurs in Joshua –

Joshua 1:6-7 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. (7) Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right

hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Joshua 10:25 And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight."

Following Christ requires *courage*. Notice this:

Revelation 21:8 But as for the **cowardly**, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

The book of Joshua calls upon the people of God to be strong and courageous as they follow Christ into the Land He has given us. This strength and courage originates in genuine faith in the Lord because it turns out that He promises not only to be with us, but to fight for us. It is His presence and His Person that are the source of our strength and courage.

Fundamentally, the enemy's goal is to make the Christian afraid. And when we are bound up in fear, we are weak. We make bad decisions. We turn to ourselves instead of trusting and obeying Christ. Fear, that is your fundamental problem this morning.

Fear is the reason for that gut-wrenching sensation that sweeps over you sometimes. Fear is at the root of our problem when we are discouraged and thinking of just packing it all in. Fear tells us that all that we have done and all that we are doing and all that we ever could do is not going to make a whit of difference. Fear keeps us from praying. Fear freezes and paralyzes. I doubt that you could name one single difficulty you are experiencing this morning that is not at least tempting you to fall prey to fear. Fear that your life is useless. Fear that God's promises are not true, at least for you. Fear, fear, fear. You don't sleep at night because you are afraid of something. If you want to be able to recognize when the enemy is at hand and when he is coming against you, learn to recognize fear when it comes to you.

We need to admit this. We are fearful, and this fear is what gives the enemy success.

The message of this book of Joshua strikes at the very root of all of this.

Listen to it once more and dwell on it this week:

Joshua 1:5-9 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. (6) Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. (7) Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good 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 good success. (9) Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. **Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."**