

“A Vision Fulfilled”

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Abbreviations for Versions of the Bible

NASB (New American Standard Bible)

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NKJV (New King James Version)

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AMP (Amplified Bible)

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ESV (English Standard Version)

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HCSB (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

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KJV (King James Version)

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NIV (New International Version)

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Chapter 1: Essentials for Fulfilling the Vision

Joshua 1:1-9

I don't want to be overly dramatic, but it may well be that we are headed into the most important, the most critical time in the last thirty years at First Baptist Church of Powell. We recently spent fifty days of prayer and fasting as a church where we prayed as one to seek the direction that God would have us to go. Our elders are seeking the Lord as to the direction He desires for us. On August 19-20, the elders will spend extended time at a retreat where we will hopefully clarify and solidify the basics of the vision that God has for us for both the immediate and extended future. Our plans are to then present the vision to the church on September 11.

I believe that God has led me to the book of Joshua to prepare us for the vision and then to take us into the early stages of seeing the vision fulfilled. In the book of Joshua, we see God giving His people a clear vision that was prepared for and carried out successfully in God's enabling power.

After forty years of wilderness wanderings, the people were now ready to take possession of the promised land, the land of Canaan. Joshua faced a humanly impossible task. Moses, one of the greatest leaders that the world has ever known, was now dead, but the vision, the purpose and the plans of God did not die with him. Joshua was now the leader who succeeded Moses. Joshua was charged with taking about two million people who were prone to complaining, who were not adequately trained in warfare, and with these people, go against fortified cities and trained seasoned armies. From a human perspective, Joshua's task was an impossible one.

When we, the elders, present the vision that God has called us to on September 11, I will guarantee you that it will be bigger than our natural abilities. As I shared in a message on June 26, 2016, the vision will be bigger than we are. God typically calls us out of our comfort zones so that we have to trust Him to accomplish the vision. I promise you that the vision that God will lead us to will require us to leave our comfort zones in giving, working, and trusting the Lord to supply what is needed to accomplish the vision. Don't be shocked when this happens. One of our most dangerous idols as individuals, and as a church, is the idol of *comfort*. We don't want a ministry that will tie us down because we want to be free to travel. We don't want the church to step out in some expensive endeavor, because that means we would all be challenged to give beyond what we *feel comfortable* with. We don't want to get involved in a ministry that has us doing something we have never done before. You get the idea.

As for the messages, here is where we are headed. For today, and the next four Sunday mornings, we are going to learn some lessons from the book of Joshua about how to prepare to launch out of our comfort zones, and out of our lethargy, to see the vision accomplished. After presenting the vision on September 11, we will spend about six more weeks learning how God will accomplish the vision using principles from Israel's taking possession of their promised land.

In spite of the huge task Joshua faced, he had a promise from God concerning the land (v 3), the presence of God with them (v 5), and their ultimate success (v 7, 8). The same God who was with Joshua will be with us. Malachi 3:9: "For I, the Lord, do not change..." I believe that we are on solid ground when we look to Israel as an example of how God works today. Paul was speaking of Israel in the time period we are looking at when he said in 1 Corinthians 10:11a: "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction..."

I. Fulfilling the Vision Requires Possessing Our Possessions (v 1-4)

When God gives a vision, a direction, or marching orders, we can rest assured that where God guides, He provides. Over 500 years earlier, God had promised this land to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12:7). Now, God affirms to Joshua that the land of Canaan has been given by God to the Israelites (verse 2). Now it is time for Joshua to lead the Israelites to possess their possessions.

I believe that the book of Ephesians, in the New Testament, is a companion book to Joshua in the Old Testament. The parallels between the two books are obvious. We read in Ephesians 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has [already] blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” When God gives direction to His people, He has already given them all that they need to accomplish their God given task. The Christian life, boiled down to its essence, is simply launching out in obedience drawing on the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places that God has already given to us.

Here, then, is the task of the leaders of this church – we are to seek the Lord for the specifics of what He has chosen for us, and then we are to trust Him to provide whatever it takes to accomplish the vision that He has given us. He has already made the provision available to us.

Perhaps you say, “Pastor, you are over simplifying things.” My response is, “You are over-complicating things.” Notice the language that God used with Joshua in verse 3 – “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses.” There were certainly delays, disobedience, and faith failures on the part of the Israelites. The reason that they did laps around Mount Sinai for almost forty years was that they came to the edge of the promised land, at a place called Kadesh-Barnea, and, because of fear, they failed to go possess what God had given them. The result was that every Israelite twenty years and older (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) would die in the wilderness. But now they are ready to step out in obedience. The Israelites had not yet crossed the Jordan River to go into the promised land and yet God speaks in the past tense – “I have given it to you.” The task in front of Joshua was to possess the land God had already given them.

I love the story that Charles Spurgeon told of a widow in his church who lived in dire poverty in the slums of London. Her house was so poorly constructed that the cold winter wind would blow through the cracks in the wall and make heating the house impossible. She had attached paper over the cracks to try to keep the wind out. Charles Spurgeon heard about this poor widow and went to visit her. He asked if she had any family that could help her. She reported that she only had one son whom she hadn’t seen in a long time. He was working in South America. Spurgeon asked if she ever heard from him. She said that she regularly got a letter from him and there was usually some kind of paper with the letter but she could not read it – it was in another language. Spurgeon asked what she did with paper. She said that she used it to cover the cracks in the house to keep the cold wind out. Spurgeon asked to see the paper, and to his surprise found that it was currency from the country where her son was working. She was living in poverty while she possessed a fortune! She had not possessed her possessions.

Our God has given every one of His children glorious possessions – all that we truly need. 2 Peter 1:3: “seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.”

Conquering the promised land was a seemingly impossible task. Its walled cities seemed like unconquerable fortresses, and its armies were trained and experienced. In addition, there were giants in the land. But God said, “I have given them to you.”

As individuals we must possess our possessions! When the devil fails to keep us from coming to Christ for salvation, he will strive to keep you in the wilderness so that you do not experience that

“abundant life” that is your rightful possession. As with individuals, even so churches often fail to possess their possessions. It is easy for a church to fall into patterns of running programs, keeping the status quo, and seeing little fruit. In this time of seeking God as to the vision He has for us, we will be called to step out in faith, and there will be giants we will have to face, but where He guides us, he will empower us to possess what He has already given us.

II. Fulfilling the Vision Requires Proceeding in His Power (v 5-7)

Our Lord is pleased when we abide in Him and draw upon His power for all we need to possess our possessions. Allow me to state once again that our God is constantly leading us as individuals and as a church body into water over our heads so that we are crowded in close to Him because we are desperate for Him and the power that only He can give.

A. We Must Be Confident in God’s Promise (v 5)

When it came to the past, Joshua’s experience with his people, the Israelites, was mixed. He had seen “the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.” He saw victory over the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16) and disappointment over the lack of faith in ten of the twelve spies who went in to Canaan to check out the land. The ten spies disregarded God’s command and God’s provision to take the land He had promised. Instead, they had set their eyes on the obstacles and the opposition and turned away in cowardice, refusing to believe what God said. As Joshua gets ready to lead the Israelites into the promised land, God reminds him of some things he already knows, but needs to be reminded of.

First, God reminds Joshua of the fact that in God’s strength, no enemy can defeat him. No man will be able to stand “before him,” or as the NIV says “against you.” This is not just for Joshua! There are many promises like this to believers:

Romans 8:31b “If God is for us, who is against us?”

Romans 8:37 “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.”

Isaiah 54:17 “No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their vindication is from Me,” declares the Lord.”

If we really believed that, we would have a holy boldness that would alarm the devil himself! God is reminding Joshua in verse 5 that He [God] didn’t die with Moses. God, as always, is alive and well!

Second, the Lord then reminds Joshua that just as He was with them in the past when they obeyed Him, even so He will be with them as they take the promised land! That same promise is repeated in the New Testament in Hebrews 13:5b: “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,” so that we confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?”

Oh how precious these promises are to God’s people today! We must learn to live on the basis of His promises and not on our feelings or temporal circumstances.

B. We Must Be Courageous in Taking Our Possessions (v 6)

Three times (v 6, 7, 9) we are told to “be strong and courageous.” Our God is constantly calling us to step out into the deep water and that calls for spiritual strength and courage. The Hebrew word translated, “be strong” means “to be firm.” When it comes to stepping out in obedience, we are to be firm and “strong in the Lord” with no vacillating or turning back. Courage is not the absence of fear; courage is constantly choosing to keep on obeying God when everything around you is

saying, “Quit.” Courage is when we step out in obedience when our flesh is saying, “Run the other way.” Courage is facing our fears and difficulties in the enabling power of God and refusing to go back to a life of mediocrity and human comfort.

C. We Must Be Careful to Practice Complete Obedience (v 7)

Obedience to God is always the right thing to do, but it is seldom the easiest thing to do! Success (from God’s perspective – the only perspective that counts) comes only from complete obedience. Partial obedience is in reality - disobedience. I believe that I speak for the elders of this church when I say that we are committed to obedience in every area of the life of this church. It is so easy to just overlook some areas, but when we do, there will be a failure to have God’s power and enabling. Without that, we can do absolutely nothing!

III. Fulfilling the Vision Requires that We Purpose to Prosper (v 8)

The Hebrew word translated “prosperous” literally means “to push forward” in the sense of completing the task. The word translated, “success” means to have insight or understanding. How do we have insight and understanding to carry out the vision? How do we complete the vision God gives us? It is through being guided by God’s Word in all that we do. Confidence in fulfilling the vision and courage to step out in obedience when it takes us way out of our comfort zone comes when we are saturated with God’s Word.

When the Lord spoke these words to Joshua, he didn’t have a Bible with sixty-six books! He had only the first five books of the Old Testament, but those books were the Word of God and they were sufficient to give Joshua all that he needed to push forward and have insight and understanding to carry out the vision of taking the promised land! Oh how much better we have it! We have the completed written Word of God – all sixty-six books. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit to apply the Word and to empower us to obey the Word. Simply having possession of the Word of God does not make our way prosperous or give us good success. If we would have success in the vision we are given, there are at least three things we must do with the Word of God.

A. We Must Read the Word of God (v 8a)

A Bible on the shelf is of no benefit. The problem in America is not that we don’t possess the Word of God; the problem is that we do not take in the Word of God. Someone said that the largest dust storm in the history of America would happen if every Bible in every home would be picked up at the same time and blown on! The primary means through which God speaks to us is through His Word. Do you want to hear from God? Then read the Word, and listen to the Word when it is being taught. Last Sunday night before our family fun night, I shared the statistic that only five percent of the churches in America have a Sunday night service. We have a Sunday night service, but it is only about one third as many people as are in the AM service. There seems to be little interest in taking in the Word of God in the home or being gathered at the church.

Even if you are faithful to come to the services and hear the Word of God, you need to be regularly reading it on your own. There are all sorts of plans to read the Bible. Just Google “Bible Reading Plans.” I did that and there were 1,610,000 results.

B. We Must Memorize the Word of God (v 8b)

Every Christian needs to have a plan of memorization. Memorization hides God’s Word in your heart. People often say that they just can’t memorize Scripture. My response is that if someone offered you \$100 per verse, you would turn into a memorizing machine. It is all a matter of

motivation! The only way that the Word of God never departs from your mouth is when you have it memorized and can bring it up at any time, in any place.

C. We Must Meditate on the Word of God (v 8c)

The Scriptures are to control our thought patterns. Meditation is very simply the process whereby we apply Scripture to our lives. As you read and memorize Scripture and ask the Lord, “What are You saying to me through this passage; what do You desire me to do; what do I need to change in light of this truth I have just read,” you are meditating on Scripture. I believe that the main way that God infuses courage into our lives is through reading, memorizing, and meditating on God’s Word.

When we are, as a lifestyle, reading, memorizing, and meditating on the Word of God, we will make our way prosperous (to “push forward” in the sense of completing the task) and have success (have insight or understanding). That includes completing the vision God will give us because we will have insight into what needs to be done.

Conclusion (v 9)

When we are saturated with the Word of God, we are constantly aware of the presence of God. The strength and courage to obey God in the vision, the direction in which He leads us, comes as we are consumed with His Word, and constantly aware of His presence with us wherever we go.

Chapter 2: Life Is a Journey

Joshua 1:10-11

The book of Joshua is a book of history, but it is more than that. It is a book filled with principles, illustrations, and types that are very much applicable to today. Let's talk about "types" in the Scripture. Generally, a *type* is a person, place, or event in the Old Testament that foreshadows something in the New Testament. We should never base doctrine on a type, but sometimes types are helpful in illustrating truth and thus making truth easier to understand.

Jesus used Jonah as a *type* of His time in the grave and His promised resurrection on the third day. Matthew 16:4: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." Jesus was using the Old Testament account of Jonah being in the belly of the fish three days as an illustration of His being in the grave for three days, and just as Jonah was delivered after three days, Jesus rose on the third day.

Another type in the Old Testament is the serpent that was lifted up in the wilderness. Numbers 21:9: "So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived." John 3:14-15: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life."

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-2, 5-6, 11, we see that the time of the Israelites' delivery from Egypt, their crossing the Red Sea, their time in the wilderness, and their going into Canaan was a *type*, an illustration of New Testament truth. 1 Corinthians 10:1-2, 5-6, 11:

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea ... Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved... Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

The book of Hebrews also uses the events of Exodus and the entering into the land of Canaan as a type or illustration of spiritual truth. Hebrews 3:7-12:

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways'; as I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

The writer of Hebrews continues in Hebrews 3:17-19: "And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief."

I think some people find types in the Bible that are not really there, but we must not let the abuse of types cause us to miss the types God put in Scripture to help us better understand and apply

His truth. Old Testament Professor Marten Woudstra put it this way: “Traditional typology should be used with due caution. The early Christian church went to extremes on its typological use of the Old Testament. Yet this excess should not prevent the church from using typology where Scripture permits or suggests it.” [Dr. Marten Woudstra, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament – the Book of Joshua*, page 35]

One of the most helpful illustrations or types in the Old Testament is the account of Israel being set free from Egypt and entering the land of Canaan (the Promised Land). It seems that most every part of this journey is a great illustration of clear truth taught in the New Testament. My prayer is that the truths illustrated by these types will aid us in possessing our possessions that God has already given those who are His.

I. Egypt

This type, this illustration, this example of our journey into possessing our possessions begins figuratively in Egypt. Egypt is an illustration, a type of a person who is spiritually dead and enslaved to sin. In other words, Egypt in many ways illustrates what it means to be unsaved, unregenerate, and lost with a human spirit that is dead to God. For about 400 years, the Israelites had been enslaved in Egypt. It was not that there were no pleasant times in Egypt; they grew up, courted, married, and had the happiness of family, but the hard thing about Egypt was that they were enslaved. They had no freedom.

In speaking of our lostness, we read in Romans 6:17b: “...you were slaves of sin...” Those alive at the time of the Exodus had been born into slavery. Do you see why we say that Egypt is a *type* of being lost, of being unregenerate? Because we were descendants of Adam, we were born with a spirit that was dead to God and a will that was enslaved to sin. Our condition is described in Ephesians 2:1-3: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”

Oh, what a picture the Israelites’ slavery in Egypt is of those without Christ today. Just as the Israelites, we were born into this slavery. Every natural born descendant of Adam is born in Adam, spiritually dead and a slave to sin. For the Israelites, no amount of hard work could free them from this slavery to Egypt. They may have been raised to the rank of supervisor over other slaves, but they were still slaves themselves. That is life in Egypt – enslaved to sin with no hope. Such is the life of those lost without Christ; when it comes to our own resources, there is no hope to escape Egypt.

II. The Red Sea

It was the crossing of the Red Sea that marked the final leaving of Egypt. The Red Sea then is a picture, a type of salvation. Had there been no Red Sea experience, there would have been no promised land. Let’s review what happened at the Red Sea. God called Moses to go back to Egypt, where he had been born and raised, to bring out of slavery the descendants of Abraham. When Pharaoh refused to let the slaves go, God unleashed on Egypt a series of plagues that culminated in the death of the firstborn in every Egyptian family. After this devastation, Pharaoh *said* that the Israelites could leave the slavery of Egypt. However, after they left, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and he set out to bring them back. The Israelites found themselves in a humanly impossible situation. There were impassable mountains on both sides of them, the Red Sea in

front of them and the pursuing Egyptian army coming quickly from behind them. The people panicked and turned on Moses. Exodus 14:11-12: “Then they said to Moses, ‘Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.’”

The people were still in bondage to the Egyptians. Listen to Moses’ answer. Exodus 14:13-16:

But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.” Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land.’

Most who have a church background know what happened next. God miraculously parted the Red Sea and all the Israelites crossed over on dry land. When the Egyptian Army followed, the sea closed in on top of them and they were drowned. Notice some of the ways that the Red Sea is a type of salvation.

A. It Was Miraculous

Salvation is not accomplished by human effort. It is not “making a change in your life.” It is not a pledge to try to do better. It is not just joining a church. Salvation is God doing a work in a person that only God could accomplish. When you really begin to understand salvation, you marvel at this amazing accomplishment by God. We were dead in our sin (see Ephesians 2:1-3). We were without hope. The first two words of Ephesians 2:4 are “But God” – we were helpless and hopeless, “but God.” Hallelujah!

Let’s read what God did in Ephesians 2:4-9:

But God being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Jesus “paid it all” when on the cross He took our sin and paid the debt that we could never pay and cried out in John 19:30: “It is finished!” Those who have their spiritual eyes opened and their spiritual ears unstopped see the truth, they are drawn to Jesus, and repenting of their sins they trust in Him alone for salvation. Here is the description of the miracle that has happened in every person who has been reconciled to God: 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” True salvation, like Israel’s deliverance from Egypt is miraculous.

B. It Is Irreversible

The Red Sea closed behind them. There was no going back to the slavery of Egypt. This illustrated the blessed doctrine of the security of the believer. A person who turns back to Egypt, to the world gives evidence that they never passed through the Red Sea. A *decision* can be reversed; a *new*

birth is irreversible. 1 John 2:19: “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”

C. It Is Necessary for Canaan

We will see in a moment what Canaan is a type of (hint: it is not a type of Heaven). There was no way to get to Canaan except by going through the Red Sea. Everything that your regenerate heart longs for is in Canaan and yet there is no entrance to Canaan apart from crossing the Red Sea.

III. The Wilderness

God’s perfect purpose for delivering His people from Egypt was not for them to spend forty years in the wilderness! His perfect will was to bring them out of Egypt that He might bring them into Canaan. In the wilderness, God gave them the Law that they might know their identity in relation to Him, and also know how to please Him. The Law was also for them to understand how much God loved them. God is not a *killjoy*. He is the giver of true joy. When God says, “You shall not,” He is saying, “Stay away from this because it will harm you.” When He says, “You shall,” He is saying, “Do this to know true joy!”

In addition to the Law, He gave them the Tabernacle so that they might know how to worship Him. I think there is an example here of the need to disciple new believers who have come to Christ in the basics of their new identity in Christ, how to please God, and how to worship Him. The wilderness is not a place to settle down and be at home. Allow me to give you a geographical fact that might surprise you. The distance from where God gave Israel the law to the promised land was only an eleven-day journey! Deuteronomy 1:2: “It is eleven days’ journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea.” It was at Kadesh-barnea on the border of the promised land that Moses sent in the twelve spies before going into the land of Canaan. We read what happened in Deuteronomy 1:26-32:

Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God; and you grumbled in your tents and said, “Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us. Where can we go up? Our brethren have made our hearts melt, saying, ‘The people are bigger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified to heaven. And besides, we saw the sons of the Anakim [giants] there.’” Then I said to you, “Do not be shocked, nor fear them. The Lord your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked until you came to this place.” But for all this, you did not trust the Lord your God.

Because they would not believe God and go in to the promised land and possess their possessions, God told them that with the exception of Joshua and Caleb (who pleaded with the people to trust God and go in to possess their possessions) every Israelite twenty and older would die in the wilderness.

The wilderness wanderings of the Israelites are a type of the believer, or the church, that refuses to step out in faith and possess what God has given them. For the next almost forty years, every day spent in the wilderness could have been spent in Canaan. Every time they ate the manna and crunched on the sand in their mouth, they could have been in Canaan – the land that flowed with milk and honey (a phrase that communicated a land of agricultural riches and a land of plenty).

They were afraid to trust God and move ahead and unable to go back to Egypt. They were stuck in the wilderness with its boredom, monotony, and spiritual dryness. The wilderness is a horrible place.

There is an application here to individual believers, but I want to make special application to a church, to this church, which is of course made up of individual believers. I believe that the vision our elders will be sharing with the church may be our Kadesh-barnea. As I have said multiple times over these last few weeks, the vision God gives will call on us to go way out of our comfort zones. It will involve taking on some “giants” and some “fortified cities” (Deuteronomy 1:26-32).

What happens to a church that decides to stay in the wilderness? They wander in circles. There is no joy; there are no supernatural victories; there is nothing unexplainable about them. They run programs, marry the young, bury the dead, and never see God supernaturally at work. A word that comes to mind when I think of a wilderness church is “barren.” The dictionary defines that word as, “producing no valuable results or interesting effects; producing no fruit.”

A wilderness church is a church that does not seek God’s vision, does not stand before Him in total submission, and does not see Him bring about results that can only be explained by, “Look what God has done.” In short, a wilderness church is a church that seldom, if ever, sees the supernatural power of God at work in changing lives and meeting the needs of the church and individuals in the church. Its baptismal waters are seldom stirred and most attendees are just attendees only. Children grow up in these wilderness churches never or at least seldom seeing the power of God at work. Lord, deliver us from becoming a wilderness church!

IV. The Jordan River

A great deal of our theology is learned from hymns. Unfortunately, the hymns that refer to the Jordan River as physical death and Canaan as heaven are not quite accurate. Canaan is not a type of heaven. There were battles in Canaan, but in heaven, there are no battles. There was sin and failure in Canaan, and there is no sin or failure in heaven. The Jordan River stood between the wilderness and Canaan. I think we would well in “hermeneutical” bounds to say that the Jordan River where the Israelites crossed to go into Canaan, the promised land, would be a type of a church and individuals in that church taking up their cross and reckoning on our death with Christ, surrendering without reservation to the Lordship of Christ in all of life, and then walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the vision God gives. The Jordan is a picture of what the fulfillment of Matthew 16:25 looks like, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

We are delivered from the slavery of Egypt (lostness and spiritual death) when we cross over the Red Sea. Then we choose individually, and as a church, to refuse to wander around in the “miserable” wilderness of trying to make our lives comfortable, predictable, and without a challenge so big that without God we can’t pull it off. This kind of life will not happen until we reckon on the truth of Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” As we count as true by faith our crucifixion with Christ and allow Him to be our very life, confess our identity in Christ (accepted in the Beloved loved with an everlasting love by God Himself, and chosen by Him from before the foundation of the world), we cross the Jordan and find ourselves in Canaan.

Here is a good summary: On the cross, Jesus assumed our identity in sin that at the Jordan we might reckon on the fact that we are in Christ and assume His identity, His righteousness, and indeed, His very life.

V. Canaan

As I said earlier, Canaan is not a picture of heaven. Canaan goes by many names in Christian literature – the Spirit filled life, the exchanged life, the victorious life, and the Christ life. Don't get the idea for an individual Christian or for a church that Canaan is a "cushy" life with no challenges. It is a life of constant challenges! Satan goes into a whole new level of warfare when we, as individuals, and we, as a church, get serious about joining God where He is at work. Life in Canaan involves daily dying. Luke 9:23: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." In Canaan, there will be times of failure, but the pattern will be victory and growth – genuine growth in individuals and in the church.

Conclusion

God brought us out of Egypt that He might bring us into Canaan where we experience His victory, His everlasting love, His acceptance, His enabling, and His fellowship. There are battles – sometimes it seems to be constant battles, but there truly is victory on Jesus.

Chapter 3: Preparation for Fulfilling the Vision

Joshua 1:10-18

By the time that we finish with the book of Joshua, I think it will be one of your favorite books in the Bible. My favorite U.S. President is Theodore Roosevelt (26th President from 1901-1909). I like him because of his fearless leadership, his forthrightness, and his courage in every arena. Roosevelt often stated that Joshua was his favorite book of the Bible. He frequently referred to Joshua in his speeches. Throughout history, many military leaders studied Joshua's tactics in taking the promised land. General Douglas MacArthur said that Joshua was one of the truly great generals in world history. Israeli General Moshe Dayan (1915-1981) studied Joshua's tactics in the campaign to take the promised land of Canaan. In this message, we are going to see how Joshua prepared the Israelites to go into the promised land and fulfill the vision God gave him. We will learn some principles that apply to this church as we prepare to implement the vision that He is giving us to accomplish His purposes.

The book of Joshua is not just a historical account of some amazing military conquests over 3000 years ago. It is that, but it is more. 1 Corinthians 10:11 "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." We also read in Romans 15:4 "For whatever was written in earlier times [the Old Testament] was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

We saw in the last message that there are different types or pictures in Joshua. Types can easily be taken too far, so we want to be cautious with them. We defined a type as "a person, place or event in the Old Testament that foreshadows something in the New Testament." We saw that Israel coming out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea is a type or picture or illustration of salvation. The time in the wilderness is a picture of the miserable life of a church or individual who refuses to step out in faith to take what God has given them. But the type I want to focus on is the Jordan River. The crossing the Jordan into the promised land is a picture, an illustration of the surrendered, Christ filled, Christ empowered life.

For a church, it is a picture of a people who step out in faith believing God to accomplish, through them, the vision God has given them. The first five messages in this series are to prepare our hearts for receiving the vision God has for us. On September 11, 2016 we plan to present the vision in the morning service. This will come after a lot of prayer by the church body (fifty days of prayer and fasting), seeking input from the congregation as to what you see God doing through this church, and many hours of sometimes painful meetings of the elders to see exactly where we are as a church, where we are failing to reach the potential He has given us, and where God wants us to go. I really believe that twenty years from now, if the Lord has not returned, we will see the time period that we are in as one of the most pivotal, important, and fruitful times in the 127-year history of this church.

Now, we see the Israelites making preparations to enter the promised land and begin to possess what God has given them. They had learned the lesson about the high cost of refusing to believe God when their parents at Kadesh-Barnea had turned back from the promised land. They had refused to trust God to deal with the obstacles that stood in the way of possessing the land that God had given them. Their focus was on the obstacles and not on their God who could speak and the obstacles and enemies would have been destroyed. Except for Caleb and Joshua (who tried to get the people to believe God and go in to the land of Canaan), the high price that was paid for the Israelites lack of faith was that all of the Israelites twenty years old and older would die in the wilderness while the nation did laps around Mount Sinai for almost forty years. When we come

to the book of Joshua, we see no clamoring to turn away from the promised land, as was the case forty years earlier. They had learned their lesson well. There was a resolve, a determination that there would be no more wilderness wandering. They were at the Jordon River, and now they were willing to step out in faith and cross over to the land of Canaan.

Word comes down from Joshua that in three days they were going to cross the Jordan and go into the land God has given them. Why wait three days? That is the focus of this message. The instruction about the three days has some clear parallels with this church. We are soon going to be presented with what we believe is God's marching orders for our faith family. We will each face a choice of whether or not we are going to believe God and obey what we believe He is leading us to do. What do we need to do to get ready to cross over into the promised land?

I. The Preparation They Required (v 10-11)

The pattern of Joshua's leadership (there are a few exceptions) is that he seeks the Lord, hears from the Lord and then he tells the people. What a great description of the task of the elders, the leaders of the church. The leaders are to seek the Lord, then tell the church where they believe God is leading, and then the church obeys God's direction that comes through the leaders. That sounds rather simple, but the church all too often complicates that simple plan.

What are the people to prepare? It is "provisions." The KJV translates it with the old English phrase, "Prepare you victuals." In earlier days, victuals meant food. I can remember where I grew up that old English was changed to "vittles." After a good meal, the comment may have been, "Those were mighty good vittles." Here it refers to food and daily supplies. With the rain swollen Jordan River between the Israelites and the land of Canaan, one might think that Joshua would have said, "Prepare boats," or "Prepare bridge building materials." God knew that He was going to stop the Jordan from flowing so the people could walk over.

So why the emphasis on *provisions*? In just a few days, there was going to be a major change. Soon after they crossed the Jordan, the manna would stop. Joshua 5:11-12: "On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year."

In the wilderness, the Israelites lived on manna which was a miraculous food that God supernaturally supplied for them. The manna had all the nourishment that their bodies needed. Other than a few special occasions, manna was all that they had to eat. I am convinced that manna is highly overrated in songs and some sermons. Manna was a course wafer-like substance. It could be ground into flour and baked, but they had no spices to add to it. The word translated "manna" literally means "what is it?" Manna was meant to be a *temporary* food to eat while they were at Mount Sinai getting the law and constructing the Tabernacle. The manna would then have fed them on the eleven-day journey to the promised land, and then they would feed on the rich produce of the land, called, "a land flowing with milk and honey." But because they refused to go in to Canaan from Kadesh-Barnea, they stayed in the wilderness for almost forty years having manna every day for every meal. They never had to ask, "What's for dinner?" The manna sustained them, but it didn't satisfy them. Even if the manna was delectable to the taste buds and tasted like yeast rolls, it wasn't the highlight of their day to eat more manna. I really like steak, but breakfast, lunch, and dinner seven days a week and fifty-two weeks a year for forty years? Even steak would be dreaded!

I want to take a few minutes here to take a short detour from the text to bring in something important. When God called the Israelites out of Egypt to go into Canaan, He gave them three

feasts to celebrate. However, they were not to celebrate them in the wilderness. These feasts had a teaching function. The children would ask the parents, “Why are we celebrating this feast?” The Father then would teach them how good God had been to them and how they had been blessed. For instance, in Canaan, they would celebrate the Passover. The children would ask, “Daddy, why do we celebrate the Passover?” The Father would then explain how good God was and how He miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt. But suppose that after many years in the wilderness they had celebrated one of these feasts, and all the children had ever known was manna, sand in their mouth, snakes, heat, and more manna and more sand. The Father talks about how good God is and the kid begins to think, “I’m not sure, but I think I might prefer Egypt to this.”

Let me show you how this applies to a family who comes to church most Sundays, but their home life is a wreck. They hear about how wonderful the Christian life is and all they have seen is the wilderness. They hear about supernatural love, and all that they see is a Mom and Dad who fight all the time. They hear about joy and peace, but all they see is fighting, discontent, and arguing over finances. They don’t know what it is to pray together as a family, see God amazingly answer prayer, see imperfections in mom and dad, but watch as confession is made to God and Mom and Dad ask their forgiveness for losing their temper or for worrying. They don’t see God at work in their home. Sometimes (by God’s amazing grace, those children grow up to love the Lord with all their heart, soul and mind, but many (if not most) of the time, they decide it is all just a bunch of talk, and they decide that they would rather dwell in Egypt. That was a long detour!

There was a time of preparation before they went in to the promised land. I think that the application for us is that we need to prepare for the vision that God is going to give us by getting our hearts ready for work and for the battle that will come as we step out to possess our possessions. If you have let your daily time with the Lord lapse, this is the time to repent and begin to spend time daily in the Word, in prayer, in examining your life, confessing sin, and getting ready for the spiritual battles that will certainly come as we step out in obedience to the vision that God gives us. Listen carefully, the strength and stamina that we have in the conflicts and challenges in life will be determined by the quality of nourishment you receive from the Lord in your private times and corporate worship times with Him. The delay in Joshua 1:10-11 was for the purpose of getting ready for the challenges and even the battles that would follow.

II. The Observation They Needed

They needed some time for the human impossibility of their situation to sink in. There were over two million people who had to cross a rain swollen, overflowing, flooded river. There were no boats, no materials for building a bridge, and no way around the flooded Jordan River. The impossibility of their situation needed to sink in on them. They needed to realize that apart from God’s work, there was no way they could enter in to the promised land to possess their possessions that God had given to them.

Over and over and over I have told you that the vision that God gives us will only be accomplished by the power of God at work on our behalf. When the vision is accomplished God will get all of the glory.

III. The Salvation That God Planned

Allow me to jump ahead to Joshua chapter 2 and introduce a text that we will look at more in depth next week. When we get to chapter 2, we find that it was in this time of preparation that two men went into Canaan (the city of Jericho) as spies and a woman named Rahab came to faith in

the one true God. One of the reasons that over two million people were paused for three days was so one woman who had responded to the revelation she had could be saved. Our Heavenly Father cares for the multitudes, but He also cares for the “one.” Think of the examples in Scripture that God cares for the one. There was only one righteous man in Sodom and the Lord withheld judgment until he was out of the city. One diseased woman touched the hem of Jesus’ garment and His journey to the cross was stopped for Him to meet her need. One poor blind beggar cried out from the roadside, and Jesus stopped and came to him and restored his sight. The “one” is important to Him; you are important to Him. 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” The Lord Jesus Christ came to bear the sins of all who would repent and believe on Him, but if you have come to Christ, or will come to Christ, He died for you – you an individual. Oh, what love. Oh how committed God is to save those whom He has called to himself.

IV. The Illustration That We See

The preparation time, the three-day pause is very significant. Think with me about all of the significant events that involved three days. In Genesis 22, when Abraham was tested by God and commanded to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, the son of promise, the son through whom the deliverer would come, notice the significance of three days. It was on the third day of their journey that the angel of the Lord stopped Abraham from taking His son’s life and in a sense, Isaac was resurrected in that he was taken off the altar and a ram was substituted as the sacrifice.

Then there is the example of Jonah that we looked at last week. We see in Matthew 16:4 “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus was using the Old Testament account of Jonah being in the belly of the fish three days, and then delivered, to illustrate that He would be in the grave, but on the third day He would rise victorious over sin and death.

I believe that the three days of preparation before entering the promised land should remind us of Christ’s resurrection power which allows and enables us to walk in victory in Canaan. His death brought us out of bondage in Egypt, but when He rose from the dead on the third day, He brought us into Canaan’s victory. We walk in victory over sin through Christ in us enabling us to walk in obedience to God. He is the living Christ who rose after being in the grave for three days. On the cross, the Lord Jesus gave Himself for us, but at the resurrection, He gave Himself to us, to live out His resurrection life through us. Colossians 1:27b “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Canaan’s victory is Christ living out His resurrection life through us.

V. The Choosing of Our Spiritual Level (v 12-18)

The background of this passage is found in Numbers 32. The people of the tribe of Ruben, Gad, and Manasseh came upon a good looking piece of land on the wilderness side of the Jordan River. They told Moses that they had just as soon settle there and not wait for Canaan. Moses agreed, but said that their fighting men had to go on and fight for the promised land, but their possessions and their families could settle on the wilderness side of the Jordan River. It is this agreement with Moses that Joshua is now reminding them of. Here is the application that I believe that we can gain from these verses. Using the symbolism of Egypt, the wilderness, and Canaan, every Christian and every church chooses the level of their depth in their walk with God. I don’t know the depth of your intimacy and fellowship with the Lord, but I believe that many have settled for a nice place in the wilderness instead of crossing over the Jordan and trusting Christ not just to give you spiritual life, but to be your life. I am not speaking here of what some call a carnal life where

“Christians” can choose to live with sin and rebellion until they die of old age and then slip in the back door of heaven. Carnality is a condition Christians slip into and if they don’t repent of their rebellion, the Lord disciplines them and scourges them (Hebrews 12:6). If they still do not repent, and they truly belong to the Lord, He brings them home early. I am speaking of physical death (1 John 5:16).

Let’s get personal. We can choose as a church to settle down and just run our programs, live our lives, raise our children, marry the young and bury the dead. We can give in amounts we are comfortable with and live lives without getting the enemy too disturbed and having constant spiritual warfare. We could do good things, see a few people come to Christ every now and then, grow old and die. That’s the attitude of the people of the tribes of Ruben, Gad and Manasseh. Personally, I am nauseated at the thought of that. I don’t want to be a part of a church like that. I don’t want to stand at the Bema of Christ described in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, and as 1 Corinthians 3:15 (HCSB) says, “If anyone’s work is burned up, it will be lost, but he will be saved; yet it will be like an escape through fire.” The thought of standing before my Savior and hearing Him say, “I would have done so much more through you, if only you had stepped out in faith and trusted Me to guide you and empower you.” I long to (using athletic language) “leave it all on the field.” I long for us to be a church that is constantly being stretched, a church with a Kingdom focus that selflessly reaches out to the hurting, the lost, the people that others overlook both at home and in North America, and to the uttermost part of the earth make disciples and when we leave this earth and stand before the Savior hear these words – “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

A poet who is unknown to me wrote these words that I want to leave you with.

*God has His best things for the few who dare to stand the test;
God has His second best for those who will not take His best.
It is not always open ill that risks the promised rest;
The better often is the foe that keeps us from the best.
- Unknown*

Chapter 4: An Amazing Conversion

Joshua 2:1-24

Hebrews 11 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. It begins by defining and emphasizing the importance of faith. In verse 4 it begins listing the heroes of faith in the Bible. The “faith hall of fame” includes people like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and a host of unnamed heroes who manifested great faith. There are two women named in this “heroes of the faith” chapter. One of the women is Sarah, the wife of Abraham, the mother of Isaac and thus an ancestor of Christ. The other name is quite surprising. We read in Hebrews 11:31 “By faith *Rahab the harlot* did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.”

On the surface, Rahab and Sarah had nothing in common. Sarah was the godly wife of Abraham, the father of the chosen people called the Israelites, the Jews, or the Hebrews. Rahab was a shady lady of the Gentiles who sold her body for money. While it seems that Sarah and Rahab had nothing in common, there was one thing they did have in common, and it explains why they are listed in this chapter that focuses on the heroes of faith. Both women had a saving faith in the one true God.

Sarah is not the only hero of the faith who was associated with Rahab in the New Testament. Rahab is associated with Abraham in the book of James. James is making the point that while salvation is by faith, and not works, saving faith always results in works. He uses both Abraham and Rahab as examples of how faith that saves results in works which justifies us before man as having a genuine faith.

We read in James 2:21-26:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God ... In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way...

Not only was Rahab associated with Sarah and Abraham, she was also associated with the Lord Jesus! In the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1:5-6, 16: “Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king...Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.” Rahab was Ruth’s mother in law, David’s great, great grandmother and an ancestor of Joseph the legal Father of Jesus and Mary the mother of the Lord.

In this message, we will examine Rahab’s amazing conversion. In examining her life, before she savingly believed in the one true God, we will see the amazing grace of God. In examining Joshua 2, we will see the amazing faith of Rahab.

I. An Amazing Conversion That Began with Scandalous Grace

I am convinced that our view of God’s grace is not radical enough. Someone called God’s grace “scandalous.” I like that phrase, “scandalous grace.” From man’s perspective, God’s grace is scandalous! Webster’s dictionary defines scandalous as “causing scandal... shocking to the moral feelings of the community...”

When a church turns inward, and stops reaching out to sinners where they are, that church loses the sense of scandalous grace. We very subtly begin to think that God's grace goes out to sweet little children that need to be saved and morally good adults who just need to trust Jesus to top off their already great life. We certainly don't want to neglect the little children – Jesus certainly didn't. However, Jesus doesn't save good people; He saves spiritually dead sinners! The moral, caring wife and mother certainly needs Jesus, but it doesn't take much to save her does it? That is a warped, non-biblical way of thinking. It took no more of God's grace to save Rahab than it took to save the moral caring person who is living a *good* life apart from Christ. Even though it took amazing grace to save every hell bound, spiritually dead sinner, from a human standpoint, the grace that saved this harlot was indeed scandalous. To add to the scandal, God not only saved her, He put her in the genealogy of Christ.

Let's look at some more details of that scandalous grace.

A. Rahab Was a Gentile in Spiritual Darkness

Rahab had no copy of the Bible, no access to the Law of Moses that was passed on orally from the parents to the children. There was nothing but spiritual darkness that surrounded her.

B. Rahab Was a Harlot in Sinful Depravity

Some Bible commentators point out that the Hebrew word for "harlot" can mean a person who sells their body or it can mean an innkeeper. That's true, but in the New Testament in Hebrews 11:31 Rahab is referred to as "Rahab the harlot" (NASB) or "Rahab the prostitute" (ESV). The Greek word chosen by the inspired writer of Hebrews has no alternate meaning of "innkeeper." No, Rahab was a harlot. She had left her shady profession by the time the two spies came, but still she was known as Rahab the prostitute. What scandalous grace – that God would draw this woman to Himself to save. She came from the house of shame to God's hall of fame in Hebrews 11!

C. Rahab Was a Canaanite Headed for Sure Destruction

The Canaanites were under the curse of God's judgment. Yet Rahab received grace. As we saw last week, the Lord put over two million Israelites on hold so that this Gentile, this Canaanite woman who responded to Him in faith could be saved from physical destruction. When she came to faith, she was no second level child of God; she actually later married the son of a leader of Israel. We read in Matthew 1:4-6 "Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king." Who was this Nahshon? We read in Numbers 7:10-12 that he was a leader ("prince" KJV) in Israel. What grace; what scandalous grace that Rahab went from harlot to marrying the son of a prince of the Jews.

At the risk of repeating too much, let me remind you that the grace of God brought Rahab from spiritual darkness, from sinful depravity, from sure destruction to marrying a prince from Israel, being the mother of Boaz, and the mother in law to Ruth, to being in the direct human lineage of Jesus Christ, to being listed in faith's hall of fame in Hebrews 11:31.

II. An Amazing Conversion That Involved Simple Faith (v 1-24)

Jericho was, humanly speaking, an impregnable city. It was one of the many city states in Canaan that was ruled by its own King. Jericho wasn't all that large, but its location was strategic. The path to the promised land went through Jericho. Jericho was protected by double walls about fifteen feet apart. Rahab's house was on the wall (Joshua 2:15). As Israel waited to go over to

Jericho, Joshua sent two spies to check out the area around Jericho. About forty years earlier, Moses had sent twelve spies into Canaan and all but Joshua and Caleb came back with a negative, fearful, and faithless reaction to the challenges involved. The purpose of these spies was not to determine whether the Israelites should go into the promised land; that was already settled; they were going in! A general likes to know what he is facing, so he sends spies to learn all they can about the enemy before the attack. It is probable that God's plan is that the people could see how impregnable the city was so that when it fell, all glory would go to God.

A. Rahab's Courageous Faith (v 1-7)

When the two spies went into the city, they were providentially led to Rahab's house. Both Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 indicate that Rahab had come to faith in the one true God before these spies came to her home. What happened to Rahab is described in the New Testament in 1 Thessalonians 1:9b Rahab had "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God." When Rahab took the spies into her house, she was evidencing her faith by her works. A true faith cannot be hidden very long. God usually puts new believers in a place where they must take a stand. That is one of the functions of believer's baptism in the New Testament. It calls for a public stand so a person's new relationship with Christ is publicly proclaimed.

We see in verses 4-6 that Rahab said something untrue when asked about the Hebrew spies. Was this a case where not giving all the facts to mislead is acceptable? This is a really hard issue. I don't want to spend a lot of time here, but we can't just skip over this issue. A similar situation closer to our day is when during WWII the family of Christian author Corrie Ten Boom hid Jews from the Nazis that sought to arrest them and execute many. When asked by the Nazi soldiers if they were harboring Jews, to tell the truth would have insured the captivity and torture or death of the hidden Jews. This is a hard issue that would require a whole message to deal with it in detail. I will settle for a short summary. We should quickly reject "situational ethics" which basically says that committing sins such as lying is OK if love is the motive. The problem with that is that it is up to each individual to determine what constitutes a "loving" course of action.

I believe that the correct view is the view Christian ethicists call "contextual absolutism." This view holds that in each and every ethical situation there is a course of action that is right and free of sin. We are told in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that in every situation of temptation or testing, there will be a way of escape so that the believer is able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." In some cases, the way of escape may be martyrdom. There are millions of Christians who have refused to lie about the fact that they are followers of Christ, refused to deny Christ and have been killed. The cases concerning conflicts between telling the truth and saving the lives of others are among the most difficult. Was Rahab justified in not giving the literally correct truths to the authorities of Jericho about the whereabouts of the spies? I tend to think that she was.

Dr. John Davis is a professor of Christian ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He gives us a good summary of this issue. "It could be argued that Rahab, living in the context of war (the invasion of Canaan), and having shifted her allegiance from the king of Jericho to the God of Israel her true King, had no obligation to make full disclosure to the soldiers. Her higher duty to protect the lives of the servants of God suspended the *prima facie* [at first glance] duty to tell the truth, and her course of action was acceptable to God. In the New Testament, Rahab is cited as an example of faith for receiving the spies and sending them out another way (James 2:25). Nowhere in Scripture is Rahab condemned for her action. On this construction Rahab fulfilled the moral absolute that applied in this war time context, namely, to save the lives of God's people; and her actions, rather than being the lesser of two evils, were actually good." [Dr. John Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, page 22]

B. Rahab's Confident Faith (v 8-11)

From Rahab we learn so much about genuine faith. True faith, mountain moving faith, God honoring faith is so much more than just giving mental assent to that which is true. One of my favorite Bible scholars is Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He said, "Faith shows itself in the entire personality." [Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, quoted in *Be Strong* by Warren Weirsbe, page 38]

Notice how Rahab's faith involved her entire personality – mind, emotions, and will. In verse 9 we see two of the three elements of faith. She says "I know that the LORD has given you the land..." That is the "mind" part of faith – "I know." True faith, saving faith starts by knowing the truth about the Lord, His power, His promises. Rahab then says in verse 9, "... the terror of you has fallen on us." She feared for herself and her family. That is the emotional aspect of faith. The "will" or "choosing" part of faith is seen in the fact that she risked her life to hide and protect these spies who were of the people of God. Let me put those together. Rahab knew and confessed that Jehovah was the true God (mind). She was moved with fear for herself and her family (the emotions), and she received and hid the spies because they were a part of God's people (the will). Rahab's knowledge was limited, but she responded in faith to the light, the knowledge she had, and God honored her amazing simple faith and saved her.

Rahab believed in one God, not the multitude of gods of the Canaanite religions. She believed that he was not a detached God as were the god's of the Canaanites, but that He was a God that could be known and would work on behalf of those who trusted Him. She knew that He was not a local tribal god limited to one nation. She said in Joshua 2:11b "for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." What a grasp this Canaanite woman had of the true God in whom she trusted. She had a greater faith than ten of the twelve spies Moses had sent out almost forty years earlier. They didn't believe God was powerful enough to take the land. Rahab says in verse 9, "...I know that the LORD has given you the land."

We know that saving faith is a gift of God, but what was it that got Rahab's attention? What was the means that God used to build this strong faith in Rahab? It was her observing what God had done in the lives of His people. Rahab wasn't convicted and drawn to the LORD by a sermon Joshua preached; she was convicted and drawn to God by means of seeing what God was doing in the lives of His people. Allow me to give you a quote I have used so many times before – "We have no right to be believed as long as we can be explained." [Adrian Rogers]

Let me get personal. In the vision that came out of the fifty days of prayer and fasting, we are believing God to do such a work in, and through us, that those around us – schools, neighborhoods, and work places – will see the love of the Lord, the power of the Lord, and a people who love each other unconditionally, minister to one another, and allow that love to spill out on the people of Powell, Halls, and all the communities around us. The focus of the vision is going to involve a renewed emphasis on loving our community and while we will not neglect the unreached across the ocean, we will remember that the light that shines the farthest shines brightest close to home.

Warren Weirsbe sums it up well. "Rahab's knowledge of the true God was meager, but she acted on what she knew; and the Lord saved her." [Warren Weirsbe, *Be Strong*, page 38]

C. Rahab's Concerned Faith (v 12-14)

Here was Rahab's opportunity to escape with the spies and save herself. She refused to run because of her concern for her loved ones. She wasn't satisfied to just save herself; she wanted her loved ones to be spared and to come to know this one true God. A genuine conversion to Christ will manifest itself by the concern to have our loved ones know this God that we know. That is the pattern of Scripture. A part of the vision we will share in two weeks will emphasize a different

focus on making disciples that we are praying will shake up what most people think making disciples looks like.

D. Rahab's Covenant Faith (v 15-24)

A covenant is simply an agreement between two or more people that is based on love and truth and trust. At this point in time, the spies did not know God's plan for taking Jericho so they could not give detailed instructions. They simply instructed Rahab to hang a scarlet rope out of the window of her house. This scarlet rope is a type, a picture of the blood of Christ. When Jericho was destroyed by God's people who were the instruments of his wrath, when they saw the scarlet cord, they did not pour out the judgment upon this house as with the rest of the houses. Because of the scarlet blood of Christ that has been applied to our lives, we are saved from sin's penalty which is eternal death.

Conclusion

We can see how this all turned out in Joshua 6:21-25:

They utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword. Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "Go into the harlot's house and bring the woman and all she has out of there, as you have sworn to her." So the young men who were spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought out all her relatives and placed them outside the camp of Israel. They burned the city with fire, and all that was in it. Only the silver and gold, and articles of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. However, Rahab the harlot and her father's household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

What a picture of God's scandalous grace and Rahab's simple faith. Are you under the blood?

Chapter 5: Forward by Faith

Joshua 3:1-17

Have you discovered that we all seem to have a tendency to settle into a life where we are comfortable and are able to handle things in our own strength? That just seems to be our flesh's default mode. What is true of us as individuals is true of churches. No church just naturally gravitates into a situation where they launch out with boldness accepting challenges to meet needs that pull them out of their comfort zone and cause them to risk failure. Because of these tendencies, churches often get in ruts and lose sight of the vision that God has for them. God's vision for the church (any local church) will always make the church uncomfortable. If the challenge is from God, it will call us into a place where we are in over our heads and only God can accomplish what He has given us to do.

To accomplish a God given vision will require that we live by faith, which is to live in total dependence on God to do what we are totally incapable of doing. Our God does not want His church to become complacent, comfortable, or to rest on past victories. He is always leading to another "impossible challenge" that requires us to totally surrender to and trust in Him to accomplish the vision He has given us. I have just described for you the 127-year history of our church. There are some who have been here many years longer than I, who could tell stories from the 1940's through the 1970's, but I only have firsthand stories from 1986, when I came here as the pastor. Indulge me while I spend just a few minutes sharing this pattern of how God works in and through His church. This isn't an exhaustive summary, but a few of the highlights of seeing God give a vision and then fulfill it.

I remember the first big, uncomfortable, step we took in obedience to God. We were quickly outgrowing our facilities and we went to two Sunday Schools and two Worship services. That seems really small now, but in 1987, that was a huge step of faith for us. Many in the church had never heard of such a thing. Would it destroy our fellowship and be like two churches meeting in the same building? How would we get enough teachers? Yet the church voted unanimously to follow the path we believed that God was leading us on. God blessed, but before we could catch our breath, He led us to build a new education building. That was a huge step of faith.

In early 1990 we completed the three story education building where the fellowship hall and preschool department are today. Maybe now we could cool it awhile and be comfortable. No, there was more.

We next moved to three morning worship services, and an overflow area for the evening service for those who we could not fit into the worship center. Could we relax now? No, God began to work through some of the men in our church about becoming more personally involved in international missions. Groups started going to Brazil, and to make it more affordable, the church paid a large portion of the cost and the missions budget skyrocketed. How were we going to afford this? We obeyed and trusted in the God who never has a financial crisis. The money came in. Eventually the vision led us to adopt multiple unreached, unengaged people groups in some of the most remote places on earth.

In 1997, God led us to build a new worship center. Here was the really uncomfortable part of that. We sensed that He was leading us to not borrow for the building. The building was going to cost about five million dollars. How would we ever raise that kind of money? We launched out into water over our head and trusted God to provide. He did! In spite of huge problems that included the pew company going bankrupt and leaving us in a lurch, in August of 2000 we moved into the Worship Center, debt free.

Now we could relax and be comfortable? No, there was another level. It had to do with changing the whole structure of leadership to a more Biblical approach of elders leading the congregation and not just one man. That involved a long process of educating our people in what we believed that the Bible taught on this issue and changing our constitution. There was potential for great turmoil and some churches have even split over this issue, but we moved ahead trusting God and the transition to an elder system (which took several years) went through with very little opposition. We had obeyed the Lord and now maybe we could relax? Not so!

In 2006, God led us to start a Christian school. It was a real step of faith because it was not to be like most other church started schools. This one would never be self-supporting because the children from less affluent families could attend with tuition based on income.

Surely now, we could slow down a little and coast. Not so! God opened another door involving revitalizing struggling churches. FBC Fountain City asked if we could come alongside and help this church that had struggled with a twenty-year decline in attendance. That “assistance” led to a merger of the churches so that in June of 2008, the First Baptist Church of Fountain City became the First Baptist Church of Powell – Fountain City Campus. A significant number of families answered the call to leave the Powell Campus and invest their lives in the Fountain City revitalization. On January 1, 2017, this revitalized church will be handed back over to the congregation and will once again become the First Baptist Church of Fountain City. Later, one of our elders, David Trent was called out to plant a new church in the “Old North Knoxville” area and after an appeal for those who would go with him, sixty-seven of our people (counting their children) went on this new adventure.

In recent years God led us to build the Family Life Center, purchase more property, and a multitude of other challenges. The Lord has sent out several families who have sensed God leading them to struggling churches who had a connection with our church primarily through the pastor of the churches having come out of this church. We have just heard of another church who wants to talk to us about a revitalization.

I know, I left out a whole bunch of things, but what a journey God has taken us on! It has not all been smooth. In some of the directions we have gone there were people who chose not to go with us, they left the church, and we grieved over them. Yet in all of this, as we have trusted in God, He has supplied the finances, the people, and the wisdom to carry out everything that He has given us to do. When we as a church, or you as an individual say, “That’s it. I want to just be comfortable for a while. I’m tired of always being in over my head and having to live in total dependence on God,” growth stops (individual growth and church growth), and we become stagnant. God seems far away, joy fades, life loses its adventure, and we begin a season of wasting our lives and being subject to the correcting discipline of God. God is so committed to finish what He started with us that He will sacrifice our comfort, our circumstance based serenity, and our circumstance fueled pleasure to take us to the next level of growth and intimacy with Him. Philippians 1:6 (AMP): “And I am convinced *and* sure of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] *and* perfecting *and* bringing it to full completion in you.” That is true of individuals and of churches.

Let’s go back to Joshua. We move from last week, where we looked at the faith of an individual named Rahab, to the faith of a nation who was being led way out of their comfort zone to possess the land God had given them. Learn this: every time God leads His people on a new adventure of obedience, there are going to be obstacles – seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Next week as we share the vision that God has given us, there will obstacles to seeing these visions fulfilled. We must avoid playing the coward and turning away because the obstacles seem insurmountable. We must continue forward by faith.

I. Preparation for Going Forward by Faith (v 1-5)

The Israelites faced the impossible barrier of the swollen Jordan River. Normally the Jordan River isn't all that big. On our first trip to the Holy Land, my biggest surprise was the Jordan River. I had something like the Mississippi River in my mind. In places during the dry parts of the year, it looks more like the Beaver Creek! The Jordan River flows north to south. It stretches over 200 miles from Mount Herman to the Dead Sea. Mount Herman is about 9,232 feet above sea level (Mount LeConte in the Smoky Mountains is about 6600 feet) and the Dead Sea is the lowest elevation on land anywhere in the world (1,407 feet below sea level). At Jericho, the width of the Jordan River was normally about thirty yards wide. However, at this time of the year it was swollen by rains and the melting snow on Mount Herman. At the time the Israelites were preparing to cross into Jericho, the Jordan was close to a mile wide. It had a current of about ten MPH. Suffice it to say that it was an absolute impossibility for about two million people to cross the Jordan. One of the reasons that God left them there for three days was so that the impossibility of the situation would sink in.

Perhaps you can identify with these Israelites. You may be personally facing a seemingly impossible obstacle that stands between you and doing what you believe that God is leading you to do, but I want to focus on the church. This past week, I was sitting at an eleven and under football game with my friend, Pastor Jerry Cox, the longtime pastor of Powell Church of God. We were both there watching our grandsons play and we began to talk about how fast the culture has been taken over by the forces of darkness. The speed with which the Christian influence in our land has all but disappeared is mind boggling. I know of no one who predicted that it would happen this fast. We can truly relate to what Joshua said in verse 4: "...for: you have not passed this way before."

This is no time for us, as a church, to form our little cocoons and isolate ourselves from the world around us. This is the time we become more aggressive than ever before in making disciples. The vision we will share next week will focus on that. The task is impossible. On a personal level, your struggle may be with raising children in a Satan controlled culture; it may be problems with your vocation, pressure to accept as normal and acceptable what God calls sin, or any number of other things. May I suggest to you that perhaps God has allowed us to come to this place to give us the opportunity to get away from a self-empowered, self-controlled life – a comfortable life where we think we are in control and fairly comfortable.

In verse 5, the word translated "consecrate" means to sanctify or set apart. It speaks of a total, nothing held back, surrender to the Lord. We will never see what God has for us come to fruition (personally or in the church) until there is a complete surrender to the Lord, giving Him the complete control of our lives. In this culture it is clearer than ever that we have to choose sides. In reality, there never was a middle road, but now the absence of that middle road is obvious to all. Those who refuse to give Him control will continue in the wilderness and be under the disciplining hand of God. That is the preparation for moving to the next level.

II. The Promises for Going Forward by Faith (v 6-13)

Ten times in this chapter, the Ark of the Covenant is referred to. The ark symbolized the presence and promises of God. The ark went ahead of the people so that all could see it. When we take our eyes off our sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient God, we put our eyes on the circumstances and the obstacles. When we do that, our faith fades and we retreat back to the wilderness. The world system that has Satan as its god seems so powerful; it seems to have control and seems to be winning over the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It has captured the government, the media, and an ever increasing number of the churches. We desperately need the manifest presence of God in

our homes and in our churches before we can chase out the darkness with the light of God's truth. As the Israelites faced the impossible to cross Jordan River, Joshua puts the Ark of the Covenant ahead of them for all to see. Oh may we see the manifest presence of God and never run in cowardice from the world system which seeks to conform us to its views and values.

Here is the promise that God gave to them. He said that when the feet of the priests touched the water of the Jordan, the river would stop and they would cross. That is the way God's promises work. We obey and then He acts. We would rather God said, I will part the waters of the Jordan and then you head for the river and cross over. That isn't the way God works. He desires that we walk in dependence on Him and in complete trust in Him, and that we step out in obedient faith at His direction. We say, "Do the miracle and then we will obey," but God says, "You obey and then I will do the miracle." We cannot forget this truth as we seek to fulfill the vision He has given us.

III. The Path for Going Forward by Faith (v 14-17)

This is faith in action. Warren Weirsbe put it this way, "Faith is not a passive feeling; it's an active force." [Warren Weirsbe, source unknown]

Faith involves acting on God's Word. Our definition of faith from Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones is: "Faith is acting like God is telling the truth." Look at the people known for their faith in Scripture and you will find that there was a path of obedience. It was not just a mental thing. Abraham had faith when he left Ur of the Chaldees and headed for Canaan. Moses had faith and he defied the god's of Egypt and led the Israelites out of captivity. Gideon had faith and took his small band of 300 men and defeated the Midianite army of over 100,000.

Faith is not just intellectual assent; it involves action. These priests could have stood beside the Jordan for days talking about how that they believed that God could part the Jordan. Nothing would have happened however until they stepped into the Jordan! Look at what God did in response to their faith in His promises:

- The water flow stopped just as God said that it would.
- The wall of water was held in place for probably a whole day (two million people is a lot of people).
- The River bottom was supernaturally dried.
- The flow re-started when everyone was across.

Wow! God fulfills His promises and when you launch out in faith, you will see His promises fulfilled. Was this incident literal or symbolic? There is no reason not to take it literally. Yes, the waters heaped up just as the Scripture says. I have a real problem with people who have a problem with miracles. If you have a problem with miracles, you have a warped and distorted view of God. When you have an accurate view of God, you have absolutely no problem with miracles. Jeremiah 32:27 "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?" The obvious expected answer is "No."

There are those who say, "I can't accept anything that contradicts or operates outside the laws of nature." In reality, there are no "laws of nature." There are laws of God that control nature. God is not a prisoner of the laws that He has established. We don't know how God accomplished it. There are cases of earthquakes where rivers have flowed backward (Reel Foot Lake), mud-slides, and other "natural" occurrences. But even if that is how God did it, it was still a miracle because of the timing of it.

Conclusion

In Biblical typology, Canaan represents the Christ filled, Spirit filled life of faith that sees God at work in and through us. It is not a life of sinless perfection or without battles. It is a life that has as its pattern - overcoming and victory. The Jordan River represents going to the next level in our walk with God. It pictures that total surrender and by faith appropriating the cross to our self-life. I am here to plead with you to cross the Jordan and to leave the seeming safety and comfort of the wilderness life to the adventure of glorifying God by wholly following him. Don't run from God; embrace Him, sanctify yourself, jump in the Jordan, and walk into Canaan.

Chapter 6: Overcoming Obstacles to the Vision

Joshua 5:13-6:20

When we get to Joshua 5, the Israelites are in the Promised Land! Now, it's smooth sailing...isn't it?

Not quite! In an earlier message in Joshua, we looked at some of the pictures that God has given us of our spiritual journey. We saw that crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land is the picture of the Christ filled life, the abundant life, the Spirit filled life, or the victorious life (all different phrases to describe the same thing).

Sometimes, Bible teachers make it sound like once you come to a place of total surrender, total abandonment to the will of God, total reliance on the Spirit of Christ in you to live out Christ's life through you, the battles are over and now it is smooth sailing to heaven. In reality, your battles will probably drastically increase! Now, the enemy recognizes the threat that you are to his plans and he unleashes all his ammunition to stop you. Once in Canaan, the battles didn't stop for the Israelites; in one sense, the battles were just beginning.

Canaan was a place characterized by victory, but there is no victory apart from battle. One of the early church fathers, John Chrysostom (347-407) said, "You are but a poor soldier of Christ if you think you can overcome without fighting, and suppose you can have the crown without conflict." [John Chrysostom, source unknown]

The difference in the warfare of a surrendered believer who is reckoning by faith on his crucifixion with Christ and allowing the Holy Spirit to fill him and a professing Christian who is unsundered, is that the surrendered Christian is fighting in the Lord's strength and not his own. However, it is still battle; sometimes it seems like constant battle.

Joshua has led the Israelites into the Promised Land, but immediately they faced a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. As a church, we have just laid out the vision that we believe God has for us. That vision focuses on making disciples and living a life of serving others (it is of course much more detailed than that). Now is not the time to take a deep breath and relax! Now the real battle begins. My greatest fear, relating to the vision that God has given us, is that we would yawn, decide that the vision had nothing new in it, and go on with church life just as it has always been. When it comes to a life of constantly stepping out of our comfort zones and beginning at least one discipling relationship, and getting involved in serving others there will be battles – battles with our flesh, with time constraints, with priorities involving vocation, sports, and fifty other sources of demands on our lives. We must decide if we are going to just give up or pick up our sword and, in full surrender to the Lord of Hosts, get into the battle.

Vision Application: Beginning on Sunday night, October 9, 2016, we will put our series, "Answering 10 Questions Skeptics Ask" on temporary hold, and we will use the teaching time to go over the simple discipling book, *Living the Exchanged Life*. We will take four Sunday night services to go over this simple tool to help you get started in a discipling relationship (October 9th, 16th, 23rd, and 30th). You will then be challenged to choose one person (or more) to lead through the booklet. In Body Life we will hear testimonies of people who are doing this.

Let's look at the obstacle that stood in the pathway of the Israelites. It was Jericho! Even though Jericho was not a large city, it was a strategic city. It guarded all the passes into Canaan, the Promised Land. If the Israelites were going to take the land called Canaan, Jericho had to go. Let me describe this strategic city. The walls were very high (some estimate ninety feet). There were actually two walls that surrounded the city. The two walls were separated by fifteen feet. Some *experts* think that the outer wall was about six feet thick and the inner wall was fifteen feet thick.

I don't like to "over-spiritualize" historical events, but in the New Testament book of Hebrews the battle of Jericho is used as an example of moving forward by faith. Hebrews 11:30: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days." It wasn't battering rams or dynamite that took down these walls; it was faith in the promises of God. 1 Corinthians 10:4: "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

In this message, I want us to learn some principles for overcoming obstacles in our individual lives and families and in accomplishing the vision God has given us in the church by examining how the Israelites took down the obstacle that stood in the way of Canaan – the fortress of Jericho.

I. We Must Remember Who is in Charge (5:13-15)

Joshua was a veteran of many battles. He was likely surveying the situation to devise a plan to take the city of Jericho. Perhaps he was calculating in his mind how many ladders it would take to get enough men over these massive walls; how many battering rams would it take to break through not just one, but two walls? How many brave men would he lose in taking Jericho? Suddenly he sees an armed man facing him with his sword in his hand. Joshua says, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" To paraphrase, this mysterious man said, "I have not come to take sides; I have come to take over."

Who was this mysterious man? Most Bible scholars believe that this was a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. I certainly agree with that. Theologians call it a "Christophany." No angel could make a place holy by his very presence. There are several of these Christophanies in the Old Testament. We need to be reminded that the incarnation of Christ was not His beginning. His conception in a virgin's womb was the eternal God the Son taking on a human body with all of its limitations. Here, God the Son is called "the Captain of the Lord's host." The Lord temporarily took the form of a man to encourage and guide Joshua. This was the fulfillment of a promise that God made to Joshua in Joshua 1:5,9: "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...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."

Here is a lesson that I want us to learn; when obstacles arise, don't try to get the Lord on your side. We find out what His plan is and get on His side! Joshua was reminded that he was second in command; the Lord was in charge. This was not Joshua's battle; it was the Lord's. In times of trial and conflict I need to be reminded that it is the Lord's battle; my part is to do what the Captain of the Lord's hosts tell me to do. When I look at the drastic decline of the evangelical church in America, the dire predictions of where the church is headed, and the direction our nation is going, I get overwhelmed and discouraged. The battle is not ours; it is the Lord's and as He was not in a panic over ninety-foot-high walls and an impossible task, neither should I be in a panic – the battle is the Lord's.

Hudson Taylor (1832-1905), the pioneer missionary to inland China and founder of the China Inland Mission, taught that there were three ways to do God's work. "One [way to do God's work] is to make the best plans we can and carry them out to the best of our ability...or, having carefully laid out our plans and determined to carry them through, we may ask God to help us, and to prosper us in connection with them. Yet another way of working is to begin with God; to ask His plans, and to offer ourselves to Him to carry out His purposes." [Quoted in Warren Weirsbe, *Be Strong*, page 67]

I don't think I need to tell you which is the best way to do God's work. We are not only to seek God for His vision; we are to continue to seek Him for His power and guidance to carry out the vision. We must be often reminded that the Lord who gives the vision is the one who is in charge of carrying it out.

II. We Must Comply with God's Commands (6:16)

These instructions that the Lord gave Joshua were quite amazing. This didn't look like a very good plan to win a battle against a difficult foe! Yet, we hear no complaining from Joshua. In his face to face meeting with the Lord, he responded in Joshua 5:14b: "And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, 'What has my lord to say to his servant?'" Why do you suppose the Lord told Joshua to win the battle this way? The text doesn't tell us, but let's do a little "sanctified speculation." I think there were at least two reasons that Joshua was instructed to carry out the battle in this seemingly strange way.

First, this methodology was a test of the willingness of the Israelites to carry out the accomplishment of their God given vision God's way (even when His way seemed strange to them). Many of the Lord's ways don't make a lot of sense to the natural man (the man without Christ living in him). One of the greatest quotes I ever read in any book is this quote from A. W. Tozer in his book, *The Incredible Christian*. I like to use this in a message at least once a year! Tozer said,

The Christian believes that in Christ he has died, yet he is more alive than before and he fully expects to live forever. He walks on earth while seated in heaven and though born on earth finds that after his conversion he is not at home here. Like a nighthawk, which in the air is the essence of grace and beauty but on the ground is awkward and ugly, so the Christian appears at his best in the heavenly places but does not fit well into the ways of the very society into which he was born.

The Christian soon learns that if he would be victorious as a son of heaven among men on earth he must not follow the common pattern of mankind, but rather the contrary. That he may be safe, he puts himself in jeopardy; he loses his life to save it and is in danger of losing it if he attempts to preserve it. He goes down to get up. If he refuses to go down, he is already down, but when he starts down he is on his way up.

He is strongest when he is weakest and weakest when he is strong. Though poor, he has the power to make others rich, but when he becomes rich, his ability to enrich others vanishes. He has most after he has given most away and has least when he possesses most.

He may be and often is highest when he feels lowest and most sinless when he is most conscious of sin. He is wisest when he knows that he knows not and knows least when he has acquired the greatest amount of knowledge. He sometimes does most by doing nothing and goes furthest when standing still. In heaviness he manages to rejoice and keeps his heart glad even in sorrow.

The paradoxical character of the Christian is revealed constantly. For instance, he believes that he is saved now, nevertheless he expects to be saved later and looks forward joyfully to future salvation. He fears God but is not afraid of Him. In God's presence he feels overwhelmed and undone, yet there is nowhere he would rather be than in that presence. He knows that he has been cleansed from his sin, yet he is painfully conscious that in his flesh dwells no good thing.

He loves supremely One he has never seen, and though himself poor and lowly he talks with familiarity with One who is King of all kings and Lord of all lords,

and is aware of no incongruity in so doing. He feels that in his own right he is altogether less than nothing, yet he believes without question he is the apple of God's eye and that for him the Eternal Son became flesh and died on the cross of shame... Incredible Christian!

[Warren Weirsbe, *The Best of A. W. Tozer*, page 98-99]

Our task is not to understand the *whys*; our task is to obey God and follow His directions. Dawson Trotman was the founder of the Navigators. His biography (*Daws*) has impacted hundreds of thousands of people (including me). Trotman had a military background. On occasion he would line up his four children and beginning with the oldest, he would ask this question, "What do your mother and I ask you to do?" The child would reply, "One thing, sir." Trotman would then proceed down the row asking the same question of every child. Then he would return to his oldest child and say, "And what is that one thing?" The oldest child would say, "To do everything you say, sir!"

[Donald Campbell, *Joshua: Leader Under Fire*, page 51]

You may think that that is a little over the top, but that is a great way to look at our heavenly Father. What does He require of us? To do everything that He says. But the glorious truth is that He gives us the power and desire to do all that He says!

Sometimes the Lord leads us in a way from what seems like the way that makes the most sense. Are we going to pass the exam and obey Him or are we going to take the "pragmatism" path and do that which seems to make sense to us?

Second, I believe that these strange sounding instructions were to allow the Israelites to observe the human impossibility of taking down Jericho. Alan Redpath said, "That Jericho of yours will stand in front of you until there comes a moment in your life when you understand that Jericho is God's gift to you in Christ. The victory over it is yours to take, but God will give it to you only when you get to the place in Christian experience where you fully admit in His presence that you are utterly unable to take it yourself." [Alan Redpath, *Victorious Christian Living*, page 106]

God allows us as individuals and as a church to come into impossible situations so that we can see God at work doing what only He can do. When this happens He gets all the glory.

III. We Must Continue to Obey When Nothing Visible Is Happening (v 7-15)

Notice in Joshua 6:13 that they, "went on continually." They kept circling and nothing happened. There is nothing that indicates that Joshua told them the plans more than one day at a time. They must have been thinking, "How long is this going to continue? When is God going to do something?" Here is where we often miss the Lord. We have sought the Lord, we have set out to obey, but nothing seems to be happening. The temptation is to give up. Maybe we missed the Lord. There is a verse that haunts me in the book of Hebrews. It is Hebrews 6:12: "so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Continuing on when there seems to be nothing happening, is where success and failure are primarily determined.

In this microwave, instant gratification world, it is hard to wait on the Lord. That is one reason why there are so many verses exhorting us to wait on the Lord. Here are a few.

Isaiah 30:18b (ESV): "For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him."

Isaiah 40:31: "Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength..."

Hebrews 10:36: "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised."

William Cary, who is often called the father of modern missions, labored seven years before he saw the first Hindu convert. Martha said to Jesus in John 11:21: “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” Martha missed a healing and saw a resurrection from the dead. Oh how impatient we are. So many people march around their Jericho six times and then quit. How incredibly sad. Incomplete obedience is disobedience. We indeed, as Hebrews 10:36 says, need endurance, so that when we have done the will of God, we may receive what was promised.”

Vision Application: As we seek God to give us a culture of disciple making and a church with a true servant’s heart, there will be times when nothing seems to be happening, but we must persevere. Our Elders must keep the challenge and opportunities in front of us and never give up.

IV. We Will See the Fruit of Obedience (v 16-20)

Someone called this the shout of victory before they saw the victory in order to receive the victory. This was a shout of faith. This was exactly what the Lord had told them to do in verse 5: “when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat.” That is exactly what happened.

Conclusion

I am convinced that it is the will of God that in a decaying culture of shrinking churches, God has given us the vision of seeing disciples making disciples; seeing Christians helping others follow Jesus. In a culture of self-centeredness, I am convinced that God has given us the vision of loving and caring for our community as well as for the forgotten people that others overlook. Opportunities are coming. Are you ready to see God work through you to make disciples and develop a culture of loving our own community in a way that Christ will be glorified and people will be drawn to our Savior?

Chapter 7: The Greatest Obstacle to Fulfilling the Vision

Joshua 7:1-26

Go back with me more than 3,000 years ago to a place called Jericho. It is midnight just outside this city that is now in ruins. The double walls that had made the city impregnable were now just piles of rubble. There were no bombs, battering rams, or an earthquake; God had supernaturally knocked down the massive walls of Jericho. The Israelites had carried out what God had told them to do in Joshua 6:24 after He had destroyed the protective walls around the city. “They burned the city with fire, and all that was in it. Only the silver and gold, and articles of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.”

With the exception of Rahab and her family, who had helped the Israelite spies when they came to spy out the city a short time earlier, the population of Jericho had been destroyed. The fatigued Israelites slept soundly in their tents – with one exception. A man named Achan sticks his head out of the tent and makes sure no one is stirring about. Silently Achan moves out of his tent into the ruins of Jericho. He makes his way to what was the marketplace. There among the ruins something flashed in the moonlight. He reaches down and picks up a wedge of pure gold. He puts it in the pack that he has brought with him. Achan goes a little farther and sees a pouch. He opens it and finds it full of silver – 200 shekels. He looks at the wedge of gold and the silver and realizes that their value is equivalent to what a common man of that time would earn in a lifetime. He stuffs the silver in the pack with the gold. A little farther along Achan spots a garment, a robe that wasn’t destroyed in the battle. As he examines the robe, he realizes that this is a garment from Shinar, a Babylonian garment that gave instant prestige to the one wearing it. As his heart felt like it was going to jump out of his chest, he carefully put the robe in his pack and quietly made his way back to his tent. When inside, Achan wakes up his family and shares what he has found. After great rejoicing in their newfound riches, they began to discuss where they could hide these valuable items. They decided to bury them under the sleeping mat. After they scooped out a hole and put the newfound wealth in it, they lay back down to sleep. For Achan, however there was no sleep. The gravity of what he has done begins to sink in on him. He has taken what belongs to God. A fear of God comes over him. What would happen now?

When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, God gave them some clear instructions. Joshua 6:18-19: “But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things under the ban, so that you do not covet them and take some of the things under the ban, and make the camp of Israel accursed and bring trouble on it. But all the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron are holy to the Lord; they shall go into the treasury of the Lord.” Achan had stolen from God.

We get a hint that Joshua 7 is not going to be pleasant when we see the first word in Joshua 7:1. If the first word had been “and” we might assume that this chapter would be given over to the account of victory upon victory. However, the first word of chapter seven is “But...” “But” is a signal that things are going to change in this chapter.

After Jericho, the next challenge that had to be dealt with on the way to fulfilling the vision was a small town called Ai. The total population is estimated at only about 12,000 people. Ai however was very strategic in Israel’s moving on into the land of Promise – Canaan. From the heights of Ai, they could control the hill country as well as the roads into the interior of Canaan. Taking Ai was looked at by the Israelites as a minor obstacle that was almost inconsequential in their plans to take the land. As we will see in a moment, Ai initially defeated the mighty Israelites. About 2,000,000 Israelites with an army of close to 600,000 was defeated by a little town of about 12,000 people. What happened?

From chapter 7 we will see clearly what happened and hopefully avoid seeing the vision God has given us being derailed by the same thing that derailed the Israelites in their fulfilling of the vision that God had given them.

We will be looking at many of the verses in Joshua 7, but doing so thematically and not verse by verse. What is the greatest obstacle we face in fulfilling the vision God has given us? It is the same obstacle that will wreak havoc in our individual lives and our plans to honor God with our lives. The greatest obstacle is secret sin.

I. The Power of Sin

There is a phosphorescent spider in South Africa that charms and deceives its prey. The spider puts off dazzling flashes of light. The moths keep coming closer and closer until they are suddenly caught and destroyed. Sin is much like that phosphorescent spider! It has a charming power that draws us as individuals and even draws churches into its deadly web. Let's examine the power of this sin that drew in Achan and his family.

A. Sin Brings Dishonor to God (v 8-9)

The most important consequence of sin is that it brings dishonor to God. Yes, there are devastating personal consequences, family consequences, and church consequences, but the tragedy of sin is that it dishonors the God who loves us and has given us so much. The reason that we exist is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Sin puts a wedge between us and God. Instead of glorifying Him, we bring reproach on Him. Instead of enjoying Him, we don't even want to be in His presence when we are harboring sin as Achan did. This sin no doubt caused the enemies of God and Israel to say, "Look, their God is not so powerful; little Ai sent them running!"

B. Sin Brings Defeat to the Body (v 1, 5)

I warn you that the truths we are going to look at in this point will cause some who hear them a lot of problems. I would simply ask you to carefully examine the text and the principles proclaimed here (they are not isolated truths). If what I am sharing is truth, then we must accept it, embrace it, and respond accordingly. In verse 1 we see that it was Achan and his family who sinned, but God's word says, "Israel acted unfaithfully." It is even clearer in verses 10, 11, "So the Lord said to Joshua, 'Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things.'"

This truth is very difficult for Americans to understand. We are programmed to be *individualists*. "What I do is between me and God and it is none of anybody else's business." Not if you have joined yourself to a church. I am not saying that the church is the New Testament equivalent of Israel, but there certainly are some similarities. God viewed Israel not just as an assortment of tribes, clans, families, and individuals. Israel was one people before God. In verse 11 we read, "Israel has sinned."

In the New Testament, the church is called "the body of Christ" and all of us are individual members of that body. When there is sin in the body, the whole body suffers. I know that challenges our individualism, but maybe we need to choose between our individualism and the Bible – the Word of God! I am going with the Bible. It is true that each of us has to answer for our own sin, but it is not true that my sin *only* affects me. When you have a stomach virus, you don't go jogging. Why not? Jogging involves the legs, feet, and lungs. Yes, but the whole body is

incapacitated when there is a virus in the stomach. That is why the Lord uses the human body as a picture of the church.

At this point, I am going to deal with what some believe is the most controversial action of the church. I am speaking of church discipline. I don't believe that there is any other topic that is taught so clearly in the Bible that is so widely ignored by churches. I have preached multiple messages on this subject and we cover it in our new member's class, so I'm just scratching the surface here. Jesus told us in Matthew 18:15-17: "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Romans 14:7: says, "For not one of us lives for himself..."

Listen to these very important words from Alan Redpath, the former pastor of Moody Church in Chicago.

No individual Christian can sin without affecting the whole church. No child of God can grow cold in his spiritual life without lowering the temperature of everybody else around him... Let nobody imagine that he can be lost in a crowd and be forgotten. Let me say that the testimony of your church in its community and throughout the world depends on the victorious life of every man and woman on your church rolls. The witness of our church to the glory of God is affected by the testimony of every one of us. If only we would realize that, how readily we would recognize the need for helping and strengthening and praying for each other on the pilgrim journey.

He goes on to say, "My fellow believers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I bid you, with all the love I have in my heart for you, either get right with God or leave His house. Maybe some subtractions from the membership roll would be the first step toward victory in many a church. I pray God that, whatever it may cost you in terms of personal humiliation before Him and before men, you will search out any Achan in your own life... and get right with God."

[Alan Redpath, *Victorious Christian Living*, pages 119, 122]

This is a hard truth, but the key word there is "truth." I believe that we have a vision from the Lord that relates to all of us pouring out our lives as living sacrifices to the Lord to make disciples, serve, and love our community with Christ's love. The thing that will be the difference between success (as God sees it) and failure (as God sees it) will be whether or not we deal with sin in the body of Christ.

Because of Achan's sin, thirty-six men were killed in battle and the rest of the soldiers sent to Ai ran away in humiliation.

II. The Progression of Sin

Sin is very predictable. It follows a pattern. We see in this account that while Achan's sin was the main cause of defeat, the Israelite leaders were not without fault. So often, churches miss seeing the power of God on their efforts because of these sins that are common, especially after we have seen some times of success.

A. In Israel

We will get back to Achan and his sin in a moment, but let's look at the sin of Israel in this sad time.

1. Pride (v 2, 3)

These spies radiated *self-confidence* and *self-assurance*. There is no more dangerous time in the life of the church or an individual believer than on the heels of a great victory. It seems that they thought Jericho was their victory. The reality was that they didn't conquer Jericho, God did! All the Israelites did was to march around the city and yell really loud! It was God's victory.

Michael Guido has an insightful word concerning this vulnerability to pride after success. "There is no time in the life of a Christian that is so full of danger as the thrill of victory. At such time we take pride in our grit and not God's grace... The devil does some of his worst work on Christians who are puffed up with pride after a victory. The Christian who swims in the sea of self-satisfaction, nibbles at the bait of self-confidence, swallows the hook of self-sufficiency, always ends up in the net of failure." [Michael Guido, *The Valley of Calamity*, page 3]

The Israelite's prideful attitude seemed to say, "We need God for the Jerichos, but we can handle the puny residents of Ai." So many times we can trust God with the *BIG* things, but then instead of abiding in the Lord and looking to Him for strength in every area of life, we pridefully approach the "little things" in an attitude of self-sufficiency.

The progression of sin in Israel went from victory to self-sufficiency, and actually ignoring the Lord and their need for His power for Ai as well as Jericho.

2. Prayerlessness

This is similar to pride since pride is the root of prayerlessness. From the time the spies gave the report about Ai until their defeat, there is no mention of the Israelites praying. Seeking the Lord on how to take Ai doesn't seem to have been on Joshua's agenda. The pride led to the prayerlessness. Prayerlessness always makes us insensitive to sin. Had Joshua began the battle for Ai in prayerful humility, he wouldn't have ended up humiliated. Had he started in the presence of God, he would not have ended in the presence of grief. True prayer is always an act of humility. Prayer is saying, "Lord I need Thee, oh I need Thee. Every hour I need Thee."

After the defeat, Joshua prayed, but the defeat was already on the record. Joshua 7:6-7a: "Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, both he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. Joshua said, 'Alas, O Lord God...'"

The progression of Israel's sin was pride and then prayerlessness.

B. In Achan

When we examine Achan's sin, we see the progression that sin most always takes. Joshua 7:19-21:

Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I implore you, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me." So Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly, I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it."

Notice the progression of sin in Achan's life and learn the lesson well.

1. He Considered (v 21a “when I saw”)

This is where all sin starts. It may be what we see in a movie, in a magazine, or any number of other places. Be careful what you set before your eyes! Psalm 101:3 (NKJV): “I will set nothing wicked before my eyes.” There used to be a song that children sang, “Oh be careful little eyes what you see.” That song applies to adults also.

2. He Coveted (v 21b “then I coveted”)

The Hebrew word translated “coveted” refers to an inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire. Achan was a thief in his heart before he was a thief in his actions.

3. He Confiscated (v 21c “and took them”)

If you had told Achan before the walls fell that he would have stolen from God by taking the forbidden gold, silver, and purple garment, he likely would not have believed you. The devil takes us one fairly small step at a time. Achan saw, then he desired with an inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire, and then he took them (the gold, silver, and the garment). Then to rationalize his decision he called it “spoil.” (v 21) The spoils belonged to the conquerors. What Achan took belonged to the Lord!

4. He Concealed (v 21d “...they are concealed in the earth”)

Achan had not learned the truth that nothing can be hidden from God.

Hebrews 4:13 (NIV): “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

Numbers 32:23b: “be sure your sin will find you out.”

We have seen the power of sin, the progression of sin, and now we see the punishment of sin.

III. The Punishment of Sin

After the defeat at Ai, Joshua began to pray, and God had some rather painful things to say to him. Joshua 7:10-11 (NIV): “The Lord said to Joshua, ‘Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions.’” There is a time to pray and there is a time to repent of sin. This was a time to repent of sin!

A. Revelation of the Guilty One (v 16-19)

Because Achan insisted on hiding his sin, God insisted on revealing it.

B. The Reckoning (v 24-26)

We know that Achan’s family was in on this because Deuteronomy 24:16 said “Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.” What a tragic end to a family who foolishly thought that the omniscient God would not see their sin.

Conclusion

As we become a church of poured out lives in discipling others (helping them follow Jesus), and poured out in loving service to the unchurched, in the schools, neighborhoods, and celebrations, we must never forget the obstacle that will hinder all that we seek to accomplish for God's glory. That obstacle is hidden sin. It will not only bring God's discipline on you, it will weaken and handicap the body of Christ in fulfilling the vision. There is a solution. In a word it is repentance. 1 John 1:9 does not use the word "repent" but repentance is assumed because you cannot obey 1 John 1:9 apart from turning from your sin. 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Chapter 8: Dealing with Failure God's Way

Joshua 8:1-29

It is hard to understand how amazing Joshua 8 is until you understand what had just happened in Joshua 7. If you had to pick one word to describe Joshua 7, it would be "failure." It was not the failure of just one man named Achan, and his family; it was widespread failure. Let me set the scene. After God had miraculously delivered the impregnable city of Jericho to Israel, the next task in fulfilling the vision to possess the Promised Land, the land of Canaan, was to take a small city called Ai. Ai was a seemingly insignificant city, but it had great strategic significance. It was located in the hill country, and from Ai all of the main routes into Canaan, the Promised Land, could be watched and guarded. The taking of Ai should have gone off without a hitch. The population of Ai was only 12,000 people. There were close to 2 million Israelites and the Israelite army numbered about 600,000. But when a small force of Israelites attacked Ai, they were soundly defeated. Little Ai caused the mighty nation of Israel to run away in defeat. Thirty-six soldiers died and Israel was humiliated.

Who failed? The obvious failure was the failure of a man named Achan and his family who took treasure from the ruins of Jericho and hid it. Achan stole from God, and his concealed, secret sin resulted in Israel's defeat and caused his own death along with the death of his family who were co-conspirators. Proverbs 28:13: "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."

In the last message, we saw that there was also failure on the part of Israel and especially Joshua. There was the failure of pride and prayerlessness. After Jericho, somehow it seems that the Israelites thought that they were responsible for the victory. In reality, Jericho was God's victory! All that the Israelites did was march around the city, blow ram's horns, and yell real loud; it was God who destroyed the walls of Jericho and gave the people of the city over to the Israelites. When Joshua sent spies to "check out" Ai, they came back with a real cocky attitude. Joshua 7:2-4a "Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, 'Go up and spy out the land.' So the men went up and spied out Ai. They returned to Joshua and said to him, 'Do not let all the people go up; only about two or three thousand men need go up...' " Can't you sense the pride? They didn't need to take the whole army – two or three thousand would be plenty. Here is what happened. Joshua 7:4b-5 "...but they fled from the men of Ai. The men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of their men, and pursued them from the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them down on the descent, so the hearts of the people melted and became as water." Not only was there a failure involving prideful trust in their own abilities, there was a failure to pray and seek God's guidance and power.

When we get to chapter 8, there was nothing but gloom and doom in Israel's camp. They had failed. Their glorious vision of taking the promised land of Canaan was now fading. Let's make this personal. How do we individually, and as a church, respond to failure? F. W. Robertson was a famous British preacher. In a sermon on August 12, 1849 he said, "Life, like war, is a series of mistakes, and he is not the best Christian nor the best general who makes the fewest false steps. Poor mediocrity may secure that; but he is the best who wins the most splendid victories by the retrieval of mistakes. Forget mistakes; organize victories out of mistakes." [Quoted in Warren Weirsbe, *Be Strong*, page 95]

We must deal with our failures caused by sin with genuine heart felt confession and repentance, but when we have laid ourselves bare before the Lord, we are to accept His gracious forgiveness and get back in the fight. My favorite Theodore Roosevelt quote is this one:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

[www.goodreads.com].

From Joshua 8, let's see how God led Israel to deal with defeat and failure. There will be so much application in this passage to every person here. One thing we all have in common is that we have all failed, we have all fallen short, and we need encouragement to get up and get back in the battle. Be blessed by these glorious truths.

I. A New Start (v 1-2a)

God is a God of grace. Instead of forsaking His people and His leader of the people, He exhorts Joshua to not give in to fear and dismay. The HCSB says, "Do not be afraid or discouraged." God in these verses is affirming His promise to give the Israelites the land. He is gently saying to Joshua and the Israelites, "It's time to move on; there is work to do." Dr. Alexander Whyte (1836-1921), the well-known Scottish pastor said, "The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings." [Quoted in Warren Weirsbe, page 96]

In our discouragement, God says, "My promises still stand; trust me and get about doing what needs to be done." God is not through with you!

Lamentations 3:22-23: "The Lord's loving kindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

Philippians 3:13b-14: "...forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

As I have said so many times before, the problem with so many Christians is that they have their headlights on their rear bumper. They only see their past.

Over these almost forty years that I've been a pastor, I have noticed two different wrong ways that people deal with their failure. There are some that seem to just disregard or treat flippantly their failures, their sins. They sort of "laugh it off" and make flippant comments like, "Hey, nobody is perfect; I messed up and you just need to get over it." At the other extreme, there are some who seem to genuinely repent and turn from their sin, but refuse to accept God's new start, God's forgiveness, and then move on. It is like they build a monument to their failure and spend the rest of their life at the foot of their monument. They seem to be identified by their sin. God's way is to repent and confess and accept the earthly consequences while encircled by God's grace and move on with what God has called you to do.

I am thankful for the fact that God, in His Word, shows us the heroes of the faith warts and all. Abraham lied to a pagan king and lost his witness. God used Abraham mightily after his sin. Samson was a "he-man with a she-weakness" and yet in repentance, God used him in his death more than in his life. David was a man who sinned and suffered the earthly consequences of that sin, and yet he was a man who knew how to repent and he wrote so much about God's mercy and forgiveness that has so helped countless thousands over the years who have read and been

comforted by Psalms like Psalm 32 and Psalm 51. When God summarized David's life, He called him "a man after God's own heart." John Mark was a quitter who turned back from a commitment to aid Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey. This "quitter" obviously repented and God used him to write the second of the four Gospels. Peter cursed and swore and denied the Lord. He repented and was known as the chief of the apostles and history tells us that he died a martyr's death rather than deny the Lord. That's just scratching the surface! Failure is not final! Don't make a monument to your failures. Repent and then get back in the battle.

In Joshua 8, God tells Joshua to not fear or be dismayed, and to do what he's been told to do – go take Ai. God promises him that He will defeat Ai just as He defeated Jericho. The methodology would be different, but God would bring the victory. God never brings up the defeat at Ai to belittle or condemn Israel or Joshua.

II. A New Strategy (v 2b-19)

The strategy that God gave Joshua was so brilliant that the Israeli Army still studies Joshua's (really God's) tactics of warfare. What God did was to use the failure Israel had experienced earlier to deceive and bring about the defeat of Ai. God uses Ai's confidence against them just as Israel's false confidence had set them up for failure in their defeat at the hands of Ai. We read about the amazing strategy in Joshua 8:2b-13. This is brilliant!

Thirty thousand warriors go out under the cover of darkness and march fifteen miles from Gilgal to Ai. Joshua set up an ambush beside the city from the west. He then put 5,000 men between Ai and Bethel. This group was probably put there to make sure the army from Bethel could not come to Ai's aid. The terrain around Ai made it easy to hide the soldiers. The plan was simple but worked perfectly. Joshua took the remainder of his soldiers and made a frontal attack on Ai from the north. As they got close, they pretended to turn and flee as they had before. The people of Ai left the security of their city to chase the seemingly fleeing Israelites. Once the people of Ai were a good distance from the city, Joshua gave a signal to the soldiers who were hiding close to the city. They came out of hiding and went into the unprotected city and set it on fire. Now the people of Ai were caught between the two groups of Israelites. This plan was brilliant and it worked perfectly.

III. A New Success (v 19-29)

The destruction of Ai and all of its inhabitants was not as some have called it, "the slaughter of the innocents." Israel was the instrument of God's judgment on a wicked people who had resisted His truth, grace, and mercy for several hundred years. God is merciful and gracious to all whom turn away from sin and turn to Him, but He is a holy God who does judge sin. He is very patient with mankind, but His patience eventually runs out. Speaking of the residents of Canaan, God says in Genesis 15:16 (NIV): "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." By the time we get to Joshua 8, the "sin of the Amorites" (residents of Canaan) had reached its full measure.

Before we move on to the next point, I want to make sure that we understand some things about God and how He works. When we speak of the attributes and character of God, He never changes. Malachi 3:6a: "For I, the Lord, do not change..." While God Himself never changes, He often changes His methods and strategy. He is the God of infinite variety. I think that the reason He often changes His methods is because He desires for us to trust *Him* and not some *method*. That is why it is so important that we seek His will in every undertaking. God's methodology for taking Ai did not involve the type of miracle that they saw at Jericho. At Ai, it was a God given excellent

military strategy. Instead of marching around the city or blowing the rams' horns or shouting loud at the appointed time, it was the soldiers and the strategy that God used to bring victory.

Often pastors and church leaders try to "put God in a box" so to speak. We see Him work through some strategy in one place and soon, everyone is copying that strategy. When it comes to strategy – how we accomplish God's tasks that He has given us – we must be open to change, but be very careful about copying the latest mega-church methodology.

The old fashioned evangelist, Vance Havner (now with the Lord) tells the imaginary "rest of the story" of the three people Jesus healed of blindness in the Gospels. He imagined that when these three people got together, one said, "Jesus touched my eyes and I could instantly see." The other man said, "Well He touched mine and I could see forms and then He touched them again and I had 20/20 vision." The third said, "When he healed my blindness, He spit in the dirt, made mud, put it on my eyes, and when I washed it off, I could perfectly see." Then Havner imagines them arguing about how God heals blindness and soon they each form a church. There was, "The Church of the One Touch", "The Church of the Second Touch", and "The Church of Mud in Your Eye".

The methodology that God gives will never contradict His Word, but methodology often changes and we need to let God choose when the walls fall down miraculously or when good prayed through strategy that doesn't necessarily involve miracles is used.

Conclusion

Failure need not be final. It's time to repent and confess any sin involved, accept God's gracious forgiveness, get back to serving Him. There are plenty of Ai's to conquer. Don't stand on the sidelines.

Chapter 9: The Perseverance Required to Fulfill the Vision

Joshua 14:6-15

Caleb is one of those characters in the Bible that you wish you knew more about. We first meet Caleb in the Scriptures about forty-five years before the events recorded in Joshua 14 take place. When we first meet Caleb, he is a forty-year-old man who was chosen by Moses as one of the twelve spies to scout out the Promised Land before the Israelites invaded it. A part of the purpose in sending in the spies was to bring back evidence of the richness of the land and the blessings that awaited the Israelites there.

One of the places that the Israelites spied out was mountainous area called Hebron. It was described as “a land flowing with milk and honey” – a description of a rich, fertile land. There were clusters of grapes so large that it took two men to carry them. When the spies returned to the Israelites, things didn’t go too well. In addition to the agricultural plenty, there were challenges – fortified cities inhabited by giants. With the exception of Caleb and Joshua, the spies chose to focus on the obstacles instead of God and stirred up the people with fear and unwillingness to trust and obey God to give them this land that He had promised them. As a result, all the people twenty and older (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) were told that they would die in the wilderness and never go into the Promised Land. Instead of a land flowing with milk and honey, all they would see would be desert, snakes, and manna twenty-one meals a week, 630 meals a month and 7,560 meals a year. God however made a promise to Caleb, this man of courage and faith. Numbers 14:24: “But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.”

Now, forty-five years later (the time in the wilderness plus the time the Israelites had battled together to drive a wedge into Canaan before each tribe went to claim their own inheritance), this eighty-five-year-old man says in Joshua 14:12a (NKJV): “Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day...” That mountain, that hill country was the land called Hebron.

The taking of this special section of the Promised Land was wrought with challenges and danger. It was well fortified and defended, but Caleb was not deterred because he had a promise from God; he had a God given vision of his descendants occupying this beautiful part of the Promised Land.

Here is what I want us to learn from this passage. When God gives a vision concerning where He wants his people to go and what He wants them to do, there will always be obstacles that will require God’s enabling and His peoples’ perseverance to bring the vision to pass. Our vision as a church is not some mystical direction we received through a literal vision. It is a prayed through plan for accomplishing what God in His written Word has commanded His church to do – make disciples and lovingly serve those around us. As we get serious about impacting our community, seeing God turn rebels into worshippers, and watch family after family disciple their children to send them out as arrows from a warrior’s bow to impact the world, we will face obstacles from without and within. We should never be surprised at that! The question is, will we persevere and trust God to do through us what we could never do ourselves?

If we would see God fulfill the vision He has given us, there are at least three things we need.

I. We Must Have a Faith That Never Wavers

People greatly used of God are not complicated. Caleb was a man greatly used of God. He was not complicated; he simply believed God and persevered. If we become a church of simple people who just believe God and persevere, God will use us in ways that will astound us and the world! We find one of the keys to Caleb's greatness in observing two phrases used often in relation to him. Listen to a common phrase in these verses.

Caleb said to Joshua in Joshua 14:6b: "You know the word which the Lord spoke to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh-barnea."

Look at Joshua 14:10a: "Now behold, the Lord has let me live, just as He spoke..."

Joshua 14:10b: "the Lord spoke this word..."

Notice Joshua 14:12a: "Now then, give me this hill country about which the Lord spoke..."

Joshua 14:12b: "...as the Lord has spoken."

Next I want to take you back to the book of Numbers and show you another phrase that is used repeatedly of Caleb.

Numbers 14:24: "But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully..."

Numbers 32:12a: "Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the Lord fully."

Deuteronomy 1:36: "Caleb ... has followed the Lord fully."

Joshua 14:8: "I [Caleb] followed the Lord my God fully."

Joshua 14:9 "you [Caleb] have followed the Lord my God fully."

Joshua 14:14 "he [Caleb] followed the Lord God of Israel fully."

Notice the simple key to Caleb's fruitful, pleasing to God, amazing life. He heard the Lord speak, and he followed the Lord fully! In the wilderness wanderings Caleb didn't participate in a rebellion against Moses by Korah; Caleb didn't get involved in the scandalous behavior with the Moabite women orchestrated by Balaam. There is no hint of rebellion or even opposition to God's choice in appointing Joshua as Moses' successor. There is nothing complicated about understanding what it means to follow the Lord fully.

Today, we have it so much better than Caleb! The Lord speaks to us through His written, authoritative, totally trustworthy Word and we obey. On this side of Pentecost, we have the full written revelation of God, and we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us to enable us to "follow the Word of God fully"! That is how faith works! God gives direction in His Word, and in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, we obey – we follow what He has said fully. That is the "secret" of Caleb's being mightily used of God. Caleb's faith reminds us of his ancestor Abraham's faith over 400 years earlier. Abraham's faith is described in Romans 4:20-21: "yet, with respect to the promise of God, he [Abraham] did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform." What an accurate description of Caleb's faith as well as his ancestor Abraham's faith.

Church history is filled with heroes whose story is just like Caleb's. They heard God speak through His Word, and they persevered in following the Lord fully. Allow me to give just one example. Adoniram Judson (1788-1850) was the first American "international missionary." He was called of God to go to Burma (modern day Myanmar) to take the Gospel to an unreached people. Burma was spiritually dark and after several years of faithfully translating the Scriptures into the language of the people and sharing the Gospel with the Burmese, there had not been a single

convert. The living conditions were horrible beyond description and his sending mission organization suggested that he come home. Judson's reply was great! In refusing to give up and return home, he said, "The future is as bright as the promises of God."

God honored his faith and perseverance and today, over 200 years later the ministry of Adoniram and Anne Judson is evident in the churches and schools they started, many of them bearing his name. Even at eighty-five years old, I think Caleb could have easily used Adoniram Judson's reply – the enemy is powerful, the cities are fortified, I am eighty-five, but the future is as bright as the promises of God. I think that we could apply Judson's comment to our situation, "The evangelical church in America is in a drastic decline, the culture has adopted values that are the opposite of the values taught in Scripture and values that we hold dear. As we seek to be a light in the darkness, there are seemingly insurmountable financial challenges. As we go against the current of our culture and seek to make disciples and share the Gospel with the lost and sacrificially love our community, we will encounter opposition, But FBCP - lift up your eyes, the future is as bright as the promises of God. The only question for us to answer is this: "Are we willing to persevere, believe God's promises, and wholly follow the Lord our God?"

Someone asked William Booth, the founder of The Salvation Army, "What is the secret of your success?" He answered simply, "God has all there is of me." Are you willing in these troublesome times to let God have all there is of you, and are you willing to say no to your fears and your sense of inadequacy to seek to make at least one disciple? Are you willing to believe Him to wholly follow Him and stay with the truth and persevere even though the truth is totally countercultural?

II. We Must Have a Courage That Never Weakens

Joshua 14:12-13: "Now then, give me this hill country about which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I will drive them out as the Lord has spoken.' So Joshua blessed him and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance."

At the age of eighty-five you might think that Caleb would have asked for an easy place where he could have a nice little garden and spend his last years growing organic vegetables. Not Caleb! Instead he requested the very place that that had struck fear into the ten spies who brought the negative report forty-five years earlier. Hebron was a land of fortified cities and giant sized warriors. We need to understand that in any great undertaking for God, there are going to be obstacles that must be dealt with.

I remember hearing long ago a quote of unknown source – "The door of opportunity swings on the hinges of opposition." In this courageous man named Caleb, we see two types of obstacles that he faced.

A. The Obstacle of Age (v 10)

As we get older, we have a tendency to become obsessed with being comfortable. That's why the older we get, the more we tend to hate change. The older we get the stronger our desire becomes for things to be predictable because predictability tends to make us comfortable. Being comfortable can easily become an idol. When we arrange our life in a way to make everything comfortable, we begin to die – spiritually, mentally, and even physically. Don't ever lose that spirit of adventure.

Allow me to quote one of America's noted military leaders, General Douglas MacArthur. He said, "Nobody grows old by merely living a number of years. People grow old only by deserting their ideals. Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up interest wrinkles the soul... Whatever your years,

there is in every being's heart the love of wonder, the undaunted challenge of events, the unfailing childlike appetite for 'what next?'" [General Douglas MacArthur, source unknown]

Before Christopher Columbus, the Spanish Empire had as its motto, "No more beyond." Then Columbus discovered the new world. After that, their motto changed to "More beyond." Too many people have looked at their lives and said, "No more beyond." Caleb's motto could have been, "More beyond." At eighty-five, Caleb says in Joshua 14:11-12 (NKJV):

As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the Lord said.

When John Wesley was eighty-three he was annoyed that he could not write more than fifteen hours a day without his eyes giving out on him. At eighty-six he was ashamed that he could not preach more than twice a day. He complained in his journal that there was an increasing tendency to lie in bed until 5:30 AM. Moses was eighty when God called him to lead Israel out of Egyptian captivity. Michelangelo (1475-1564) was still composing poetry and designing structures in his eighty's. Tennyson published *Crossing the Bar* at eighty-three. The Bible commentator Thomas Scott began the study of Hebrew when he was past seventy. When you lose the adventure, you are old at twenty-five!

B. The Obstacle of Adversaries

Caleb had a faith that did not waver and courage rooted in that faith that allowed him even in old age to go against a seemingly stronger adversary and come out victorious. As we saw earlier, Hebron was the toughest to conquer piece of real estate in the Promised Land. That didn't deter Caleb, because his courage was rooted in the promise of God that He had given them the land. The main adversary was the giants that inhabited Hebron. The ten spies that went to scout out the land together with Joshua and Caleb some forty-five years earlier had what some call "a grasshopper complex."

Numbers 13:33: "There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

Listen to Caleb's response in Numbers 14:9 (ESV): "Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them."

Caleb said that when he was forty and he is still ready to take on these giants at age eighty-five! What happened? Joshua 15:13-14a: "Now he gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh a portion among the sons of Judah, according to the command of the Lord to Joshua, namely, Kiriath-arba, Arba being the father of Anak (that is, Hebron). Caleb drove out from there..."

III. We Must Have a Vision That Never Wanes

From the moment Caleb saw Hebron, he desired to take it for his tribe, the tribe of Judah. Because God had given it to him, nothing could stop him in his vision for this city and the fertile ground around it. Hebron also had special significance in Israel's history. "Hebron" means fellowship or communion. Abraham and Sarah were buried there. It was at Hebron that God spoke to Abraham. I am cautious about spiritualizing historic events, but I think that some of that is warranted here.

This longing of Caleb for Hebron could parallel our longing for fellowship and communion with God. We see that longing in the Apostle Paul's life – a longing that seems to have motivated him in all that he did. He said in Philippians 3:10 (HCSB): “My goal is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” Just as many obstacles, many giants stood between Caleb and Hebron, even so many obstacles stand between us and knowing “Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” There are the giants of fear, unbelief, materialism, the love of being comfortable, and a host of other giants that seek to keep us from this fertile Hebron, this fellowship with God that comes only through seeking Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Conclusion

Let's tie this all in to our vision. As we begin getting serious about making disciples of Jesus Christ which starts with seeking to lead people to Jesus for salvation and then simply helping them to follow Jesus, the Lord is going to call us into territory where we are as uncomfortable as an eighty-five-year-old man seeking to take a city away from a bunch of giants. I really believe that this vision to make disciples may involve what we have talked about so many times – the revitalization of a dying church.

On January 1, 2017 we will celebrate the end of our revitalization process with FBC Fountain City. All of their properties and assets will be turned back to them as they are now a healthy church. We believe that there will soon be another church that is close to death that will be willing to let us be the instrument that God will use to bring back life and vitality. That will involve many of you facing the challenge of investing your life, your family in the hard task of pulling up roots and stepping into a Hebron that is filled with giants and obstacles. For some the making of disciples will mean overcoming the fear of sharing the Gospel with others as a way of life. For some, it will mean finding a struggling Christian and taking some basic truths of Christian growth and teaching them.

The enemy will tell you that you're not ready for that – all you need to be is just one step ahead of the other person in your walk with God. This will involve all ages, but I especially want to throw out the challenge to those who are older, with children gone, or perhaps being retired from a full time vocation so that there is more time to make disciples. In addition to discipling others, there is the ministry of serving newcomers to our area, serving the schools and serving in a thousand other ways.

Your Hebron is waiting for you to take it. Yes, there are giants there, but God has promised Hebron, fellowship with Him, joining Him in His work for all who will dare to step out in radical obedience. Don't be left behind because you aren't willing to persevere in difficulties and step out of the status quo and believe God to empower you to take down the giants.

Chapter 10: Qualities of a Life Worth Following

Joshua 24:15

Thus far in our study from the book of Joshua, we have focused on principles that relate to how we fulfill the vision that God has given to this church to pour out our lives to make disciples. Those disciples we are to make may be in our own home, in our neighborhood, in our school, in our workplace, in West Africa, East Asia, Kenya, Salt Lake City, or South Asia.

Discipleship begins when a person is saved by faith alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. Discipleship continues as we continue in an ever deepening walk of following Jesus. We have emphasized in almost every message in this series that discipleship is helping another person follow Jesus, but I want to add something very important to that simple and true definition. The discipler (the one doing the discipling) is not just a dispenser of truth; the discipler is one whose life must exemplify the truth. An effective discipler can say with the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1 (KJV): “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”

Can you say that to your children, to your spouse, to those you work with or go to school with? Perhaps this is the biggest obstacle some are dealing with in making disciples. When we say, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ,” we are not speaking of sinless perfection; we are talking about a person who as a pattern of life follows Christ. In following Christ, we stumble, we sin, we fall short, but when we do we deal with the sin God’s way – we repent, and manifest that repentance by confessing our sin. 1 John 1:9 (NIV): “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” If our sin was against another person, we also confess to them and ask their forgiveness.

In this last message from Joshua, I want to focus on the life of the disciple maker. We have said multiple times that every Christian, wherever that Christian is in his or her spiritual maturity, can disciple others. When it comes to knowledge of the Bible, you just have to know a little more than the person you are discipling. But in saying these things, I am speaking of maturity and Bible knowledge, not of a disobedient believer. Can you truly say to someone who is a new or immature Christian who is willing to spend time with you to study the little booklet, *Discipleship Basics*, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ”?

In this message, we will emphasize that the one who would disciple another is a leader. You may not have what the world would call leadership abilities, but every Christian can be a leader in discipling another believer if that Christian can say, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” One of the simplest definitions of a leader is this: “A leader is a person who has someone following him.” By definition, a person who is discipling another person is a leader because the disciple is following the discipler as he or she is following Christ.

In the Old Testament sense of the word, Joshua was a discipler. When he laid out the challenge we read in Joshua 24:15, he was challenging the people to follow him as he followed the Lord. In this final message in the book of Joshua, I want to look at Joshua’s life that was so effective in leading Israel to follow the Lord. I am convinced that we will see many qualities that will guide us in being fruitful disciple makers.

I. The Preparation for Joshua’s Leadership

When God chooses to accomplish something through a man or woman, He prepares that man or woman for the task. Many times that preparation takes decades. When you look at Joshua’s life you can see how God was preparing him even while he was a slave in Egypt. If you are a Christian,

you need to know that God doesn't waste your trials. He causes or allows circumstances in your life to equip you for what He has prepared for you.

A. God Used Suffering to Prepare Joshua

Joshua was born into slavery in Egypt. He knew what suffering was. We read in Exodus 3:7, 9: "The Lord said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings...Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.'"

It seems that for God to greatly use us He first chooses to let us go through some times of trial to get us ready. 1 Peter 5:10: "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." Suffering, when submitted to as being allowed by God, equips us to minister to and indeed disciple others. Just this last week, I was told of a woman in our church who is going through a horrific trial and getting with another woman who has gone through it. There is some real discipleship going on in that relationship, though they probably neither one thinks of it as being discipleship.

Suffering in and of itself does not guarantee that we will become better through it. Some people get bitter through suffering! When suffering (at whatever level) is a motivator to ask for, and by faith receive God's enabling grace, it becomes a tool to mature us and equip us for discipling others.

B. God Used Submission to Authority to Prepare Joshua

Throughout Joshua's life, he matured in his walk with God through submitting to authority. God matures us and prepares us to be used by Him through putting us under human authority and teaching us to trust Him to work through that human authority. God has delegated authority in four different realms on earth. God has delegated authority in the home, government, workplace and church. All of these areas have limited authority that is under God's full authority. For instance, when your boss, your government, your church leaders, or your husband, or parents, tell you to do something that directly contradicts a command or a prohibition from God through His Word, you should disobey the earthly authority and obey God rather than man.

Having given that exception, it is God's will that we submit to the authorities in these four areas. Submitting to authority matures us and equips us to trust God. We must learn to obey those in authority even when we may not fully agree with them and trust God to work through them. Joshua was Moses' assistant and the leader of Israel's Army for forty years while they were in the wilderness. Never once do we see Joshua refusing to obey Moses' orders or being disrespectful to Moses.

There were two rebellions against Moses. There was the rebellion of Korah and the rebellion of Moses' own sister, Miriam. Joshua stayed true to the one God had put in authority over him – Moses. God matures us and teaches us to trust Him to change the heart of the one in authority. We read in Joshua 1:7: "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." As you submit to God's authority including His delegated authority, God will entrust people who need to be disciplined to you.

C. God Used Disappointments to Prepare Joshua

Hebrews 6:12 (NIV): "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." Joshua had many disappointments. There were

the disappointments related to the release of the Israelites from Egypt. Several times after one of the plagues, Pharaoh said that he would let the Israelites go, only to change his corrupt mind.

After a period of time in the wilderness of getting the law and learning to worship in a way that pleased God, there was the very painful issue of the spies. Joshua was one of the twelve spies that Moses sent into the land of Canaan to bring back an encouraging report of the richness of the land. Instead ten of the twelve spies brought back a negative report. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the spies said that Canaan was too strong to conquer. As Joshua and Caleb protested and argued for believing God and taking the land, the people turned against Joshua and Caleb tried to stone them. As Israel was turned back into the desert, God announced that with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, all of the Israelites twenty and over would die in the wilderness. Try to imagine the disappointment of Joshua. All of his life he had dreamed of freedom and the land God had promised to his ancestor Abraham and now almost forty more years in the wilderness.

One of the ways God prepares His leaders, His disciple makers, is to teach them patience through disappointments. Let me make a special application to disciple making. A life of discipling others will lead to many disappointments. I cannot count the number of people that I have poured my life into in counseling (true biblical counseling is discipleship), teaching, praying for, and encouraging only to have them go back into the world, avoid talking with me, and even turn against me. That is heartbreaking, but God uses it to teach us patience.

The Apostle Paul knew that disappointment. Let's look at just one example. He was a minor character in the New Testament, but caused Paul major heartache. His name was Demas. We read of Demas first in Colossians 4:14: "Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas." In the letter to Philemon, Paul is sending greetings from his co-workers and he says in Philemon 1:24: "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers." But the last time we hear of this co-worker of Paul is in 2 Timothy 4:10 "for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica..." In other translations, that word "deserted" is translated "forsaken."

A life poured out in making disciples will have many disappointments. The disappointments serve to purify our motives, teach us patience, as was alluded to in Hebrews 6:12, and teach us to do all that we do as unto the Lord.

God prepared Joshua for leading through suffering, submission to authority, and disappointments. Have you experienced any of those? Allow them to accomplish their maturing and equipping work in you.

II. The Characteristics of Joshua's Leadership

Remember, disciple makers are leaders. You may not be able to lead a large ministry; you may not be able to lead a business or a non-profit organization, but you can lead one other person to Christ, and then disciple them.

Allow me to take a "time out" to show you the potential of just making one disciple a year who would then make one disciple making disciple a year. There are several hundred people listening to this message in this auditorium, but let's just suppose that 200 people committed to pour out their lives in making one disciple over the next year. As a part of discipling that disciple, they would instill the vision for them to make a disciple. At the end of the first year, there would be 400 disciples (the original 200 plus the 200 disciples they poured their lives into). In year two, suppose that all 400 of those disciples said, we are making this a lifetime commitment to disciple at least one person a year and teach those we disciple to make one disciple the next year while we

find a new person to disciple. At the end of year two, there would be 800 disciples. At the end of year three there would be 1,600 disciples. Let's jump ahead to year six when there would be 12,800 disciples. By the time we get to year thirteen, there would be 1,638,400 disciples! I know that not everyone would follow through for thirteen years, but I wanted you to see the potential. It's not about numbers for numbers sake, but each number represents a soul that is going to spend eternity in heaven instead of hell and even more important, a soul that will be a worshipper of the one true God for all eternity instead of a rebel for eternity.

Let's get back to Joshua and his leadership. Remember that disciple makers are leaders. Let's look at several characteristics of Joshua's leadership.

A. Joshua Chose Courageous Obedience

In the very first chapter of Joshua, God commanded him to act courageously.

Joshua 1:6a: "Be strong and courageous..."

Joshua 1:7a: "Only be strong and very courageous..."

Joshua 1:9a: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous!"

Joshua 1:18b "...be strong and courageous."

To lead a disciple requires courage. There will be loving confrontations, teaching unpopular truths that are counter cultural. There are times when compassion is called for, but there are times when firmness is called for. Sometimes we must say things that risk ending the relationship. Throughout the book of Joshua, we see the courage of this one who is an example for disciple makers. Perhaps the most courageous stand of Joshua is the stand he took in the last chapter of the book. Joshua 24:15 (NIV): "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."

This is really just an affirmation of where Joshua stood all along. Joshua is saying that there is a required decision to make; either you choose the Lord of glory, the one true God or by default you will have chosen the one called in 2 Corinthians 4:4: "the god of this world." Like Joshua, if you are going to pour your life out in making disciples, there must be courage to obey the command for every believer to make disciples, and the courage to call out those who need discipling to make a decision to follow the Lord or follow the "god of this present world."

Perhaps you say, "I'm sorry, but I'm just not that bold." Neither am I in my own strength. Look what happened in the book of Acts when the Holy Spirit (the same Holy Spirit that indwells you) filled those early believers. Acts 4:31b: "...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness."

B. Joshua Followed a Careful Plan

I would encourage you to study the book of Joshua. There was a well-planned strategy that was skillfully executed to take the land of Canaan; it was not a haphazard affair. First, Joshua cut across the land east to West and isolated the north from the south. Next, he conquered some of the stronger nations in the south and then moved to the north. When the major opposition was dealt with, they divided the land among the tribes and each tribe was to conquer their allotment in the Promised Land.

A person who just drifts with the current and changes with every new wind that blows will not be an effective leader and certainly not an effective discipler. Joshua had clear direction from the Lord. The Lord instructed him to take the land of Canaan and then the Lord gave Him the details

of carrying out that plan. Because Joshua followed the Lord, he wasn't sidetracked by trivialities. The discipling relationship must be flexible, but that doesn't mean that there is no plan. The key is flexible plans.

C. Joshua Practiced Continuing Perseverance

Nothing could stop Joshua. When he experienced defeat at Ai, he admitted his failure, repented, sought the Lord for what to do next, and then and then went back to Ai and defeated this wicked enemy. In chapter 9 Joshua foolishly made a treaty, or a covenant, with the deceitful Gibeonites without seeking the Lord, he repented of his prayerless decision and with integrity honored the treaty even though it was made on false pretenses.

A godly leader – discipler is not the one who is always right. Successful leaders are those who when they fail repent, learn from their failure, and keep on courageously leading, discipling, and following the path God has put them on. It may be that there are some who are reading this message who think that God could never use you to disciple another person because of things in your past. I am here to tell you that if you truly repent, the grace of God will restore you and use you in other's lives more than you could imagine.

D. Joshua Was Consumed with Glorifying God

Throughout the book of Joshua, we find Joshua focusing on giving God the glory He is due. When he led Israel across the Jordan, His focus was on the glory of God – Joshua 3:10a “Joshua said, ‘By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you the Canaanite.’” When the people were safe on the other side, Joshua said in Joshua 4:23-24: “For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the Lord your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever.” Throughout Joshua's life, there was the consuming concern that God would be glorified. At the end of Joshua's life, it was a concern for God to be glorified that consumed him. He said to the people in Joshua 24:26-28 (NIV):

And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord. ‘See!’ he said to all the people. ‘This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.’ Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance.

Joshua refused any glory aimed at himself and throughout the book deflects all glory to God. That is a quality of a person who is a godly leader, and especially a discipler.

Conclusion

If we would obey God's command to make disciples, we must have a life that says to those we seek to disciple, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” Who is it that the Lord is leading you to disciple?