

Be Strong and Courageous

JOSHUA 1:1-9

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It is good to be back with you this morning! I hope all of you have the elements for the Lord's Supper, either from home or from the table in the entryway. Several weeks ago, I turned in some expenses to Stuart, it had been about a year, and several things surprised me. Probably the most shocking to me was that we spent roughly \$450 on communion supplies over the past year. We don't even have a category for that in our budget. I think I just labeled it "COVID-19 EXPENSES." The Lord's Supper is obviously important, but previously, our bread was homemade, and we bought a bottle of grape juice every month or two – very inexpensive. But, this is part of our strange year, isn't it? Somebody said that we will know when the pandemic is over when we no longer partake of Styrofoam and Robitussin every Sunday. We are thankful for those pre-packaged elements, though, they are unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, but we are looking forward to hopefully getting back to the homemade bread someday. Following the Lord's Supper, Michael/Chris will be leading us in three songs before we dismiss.

As we get started, I want to make sure all of us know about the Fall Fellowship this coming Saturday at noon at Brigham County Park out in Blue Mounds, next door to Blue Mound State Park. We have information in the bulletin and in the email that went out last night, and I also have several hard copies for those of you without email access. If you have any questions, please get in touch with Gary or Sara Mueller.

I am thankful for the opportunity to have been away for the past two Sundays, and I am very thankful to Clayton and Brett speaking here the last two weeks. I showed you this map three weeks ago, on my way out of town, and it was a good trip, totaling just over 6700 miles, with all of the detours and adventures along the way. Basically, I spent the first week at the Bear Valley Bible Lectures in Denver, and those lessons were outstanding, focusing on the last half of the book of 1 Corinthians. I then took the scenic route home through Port Angeles, Washington, to see my sister for a few days. Right after I left here, the church in Port Angeles asked me to preach last Sunday. I agreed to that, prepared a lesson along the way, and spoke on elders as being God's plan for every congregation (based on Titus 1:3-9). They are making progress toward appointing elders there, and I am hoping those thoughts were helpful in some way. But, thank you for allowing me to be away for a bit.

As we begin, we want to make sure we clearly communicate the good news – that Jesus came to this earth and died in our place on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. We respond by obeying the good news. We believe the message, we turn away from sin, we confess Jesus as being the Son of God, and

we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism for the forgiveness of our sins. Obviously, we are thankful for Josh's baptism right here last week. I don't have any pictures of that great event, so we are sharing some pictures of another recent baptism in Hawaii. They posted a week or so ago and said, "Rejoice church! The Lord added another soul to His kingdom. Reuben Ahfook was baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of his sins. Praise and glory to God for the gospel! Amen!" And once again, I love how the children are involved in this, gathered around the baptistery, looking over the railing there. But we rejoice with Josh here in Madison and also with Reuben over in Hawaii. If you think you might be at this point in your search for the Lord, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside after worship today, or get in touch with any of the shepherds of the congregation. Our information is always on the front of the bulletin each week.

As we get started today, I want to remind us that we have come to a kind of anniversary today! As a congregation, we moved into this building almost exactly twenty years ago. As you might remember, the church started in September of 1995, and we had been renting the library at Elvehjem Elementary School. We have more pics in the frame to the right of the TV on the back wall. At the time, one of our members, Jens Christensen, was responsible for all of the buildings and grounds for the Madison Metropolitan School District. He was in charge, and when we needed a place to worship, Jens took care of that. By the time we left, we were paying around \$180 per week for the library and one or two classrooms, and a chunk of that went to overtime for the custodian, who had to be in the building for three hours every Sunday morning. Notice the preacher in the picture there, with the dark hair, wearing a suit and tie! Back in August 2001, the Freedom From Religion Foundation threatened to sue us for worshiping in a public school, but the school district defended us, as we were paying rent like everybody else. We had been looking for a place, but most facilities that would hold 100 people were going for close to a million dollars, well out of our price range.

But, right before Labor Day, one of our members saw this building for sale for \$120,000. Al and I looked at it on Saturday, we told the church on Sunday, all of us looked at it on Monday or Tuesday, and by Wednesday we had made an offer to purchase, explaining our situation to the church that was in the process of disbanding, explaining that we owned nothing but what we could fit on this cart in the elementary school – this podium, a box of Bibles, a box of songbooks, and that was about it – we didn't even own a coffee maker. They accepted our offer, and we left on vacation to go see Keola's brother in Niagara Falls, New York. The following Tuesday, at 4 in the morning, we left New York to come back to Madison. Along the way back home from New York, we heard on the radio, that a plane had crashed into one of the twin towers, and our trip back to Madison got to be pretty interesting, with two little kids in the car. Cleveland had been evacuated, as Flight 93 had stopped responding and had done a U-turn somewhere overhead, Chicago was abandoned by the time we got there, but we finally made it back home.

Several weeks later, we closed on this building (on October 1, I believe) – at the exact moment that Culver's opened down on Cottage Grove Road. We took that as a sign, as we had been traveling to Wendy's or to the Culver's down in McFarland. We had our first worship service (as I remember it) on October 7. At the time we made the offer, we had \$30,000 set aside in a building fund. We came up with another \$30,000 by the time of the closing, allowing us to put half down, financing the remaining \$60,000, which we completely paid off over the next 11 months. This building has been a blessing over the past 20 years. It has given us a place to have Bible classes. We have a place to baptize people (without going to a local lake or hotel pool, as we used to do). We've had a place to get together to fellowship. Previously, it was hard to find a place to have all of us get together. As we grew, we could no longer fit in Wendy's together! Plus, those who couldn't afford it were being excluded. We've had a place to give away clothing to the community, and on and on. Twenty years ago, I remember two of my closest friends at this congregation said, "Baxter, I don't think we can do this. I don't think we can afford

it as a congregation.” But, looking back on it, God has been good to us as a congregation, and this facility has been a blessing. We’ve made some good improvements through the years, we have some more improvements that still need to be made (starting with another new roof), and we are constantly keeping our eyes open for a new and larger facility, but we are thankful to God for being so good to all of us over the past twenty years.

As we think about stepping out in faith, this morning I want us to consider a request from one of our senior saints. Several months ago, she asked that we study what God said to Joshua in Joshua 1, as God told Joshua to **“be strong and courageous.”** I hope you can join me in Joshua 1 this morning. Joshua is the sixth book in the Old Testament. I’ll put the text on the wall in just a moment, but it won’t be up there the whole time, so it’ll help to have it open on your own.

As we make our way to Joshua 1, I want you to try to imagine getting hired for the most important job you can imagine. You’re leading a company with more than a million employees. The catch, though, is that the guy who had the job before you actually founded the company and led it quite well for the past 40 years. You are following in the footsteps of a legend, and you suddenly realize that you are completely in over your head. It’s time for you to take over, but the job is almost too big. This is where Joshua is in Joshua 1: He’s taking over after the death of Moses, he’s leading well over one million people, and these people have proven to be a challenge over the past 40 years. They are stubborn and rebellious. And Joshua is probably asking himself: Can I do this? Can I, as one person, make a difference here? Can I get these people from here, across the Jordan River, and am I up to the task of conquering the land of Canaan? It would almost be like one of us being given the job of moving the entire City of Chicago up to Milwaukee. It’s almost overwhelming to even consider! Where would we start? It’s pretty much an impossible task. And yet, this is what God is expecting of Joshua: I need you to lead these people from here to there, and it will not be easy.

Before we get to the text, I need to explain the picture on the wall up here. This was taken on the “Million Dollar Highway” about two weeks ago, the narrow mountain road heading south out of Ouray, Colorado. At this point, it’s just me and a Jeep. I saw more Jeeps that day than I had seen in my entire life combined! This road cuts through the mountains, and there are drop-offs of thousands of feet, with no guardrails, and sometimes even the white line on the side of the road was completely gone; in other words, the road itself was gone. Years ago, our family traveled through here looking for a memorial to snowplow drivers who had died clearing this road. We were coming through in freezing rain as the sun was going down, so we missed it. We got to a pizza place in Ouray, and when we told our server what we had been looking for, tears came to her eyes, and she said, “We have lost so many.” She was so touched that we had come to find that memorial. On this trip, though, I finally found it, in a bend in one of the switchbacks. Through the years, three plow drivers have been swept away by avalanches: Robert Miller, Terry Kishbaugh, and Eddie Imel. I share this to honor them, but also as a reminder that being strong and courageous is not something that was only needed 3500 years ago. Today, we still do things that require strength and courage. Today, even in our everyday lives, we need to remember that each one of us can make a difference. One person can change the direction of a family, of a school, of a workplace, of a neighborhood, of a city, and even the direction of a nation. All of us have influence over others, but exercising that influence often requires strength and courage. We need the message of Joshua 1. So, this will be our background picture today.

We will get back to the image in just a bit, but for now, at the request of one of our senior saints, let’s look at Joshua 1:1-9,

¹ Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, ² "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. ³ Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. ⁴ From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory. ⁵ No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. ⁸ This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

As we think about our own influence over those around us, and as we try to learn something from this passage, as we let God teach us this morning, I want us to think about three very practical lessons in this passage; I want us to notice three big ideas.

I. And we start with God's command that Joshua is to MEDITATE ON THE WORD OF GOD.

The emphasis comes in verse 8, as God says, ***"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night."*** The ***"book of the law,"*** of course, is the book Moses just finished writing right before he died, known to us as the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. Joshua is to ***"meditate on it day and night."*** Today, we hear the word ***"meditate,"*** and we might think of the eastern religions, where the goal is to clear one's mind of all thoughts and to think about nothing for a while. That is not what this is! Notice: To ***"meditate,"*** God says that ***"the book of the law shall not depart from your mouth."*** It's the idea of "muttering" something over and over, thinking about it, repeating it, letting it sink in for a while. We fill our minds with the word of God, and we repeat it in our minds, even speaking it to ourselves again and again. Have you ever had a song stuck in your head? It's like that. When we study the word of God and repeat the word over and over again, it has a way of changing us.

Before I left on my trip a few weeks ago, I had a goal of reading through the New Testament over the next two weeks. I wasn't sure I could do it, but that was my goal. I try to do this in a different translation from time to time to have a new perspective, so I brought along The Message, a paraphrase by Eugene Peterson, a copy I bought at a thrift store in Ketchikan, Alaska, several years ago. I started while camping in the mountains outside of Denver and made it all the way through Luke and Acts. But then I had to drive, and they don't recommend reading and driving, so I switched to a CD in Keola's car, and I listened to that for several thousand miles. But then, it abruptly stopped halfway through 1 John. The CD was just done. Now what? I did a quick search for "New Testament audio" and listened to the rest of 1 John through Revelation 1 in the King James Version. I was distracted by the thees and thous, so then I purchased the NASB audio through the Olive Tree app (for about \$25) and finished the book of Revelation in that way. I noticed that the text moved on the screen as it was being read out loud; so, you could pretty much follow along – you could read it and hear it at the same time. I say this as a reminder that we have some awesome options out there right now, don't we? There's so much on the radio

and on the internet these days that is not wholesome at all, and we are tempted by it, but we do have options. What a blessing that is! And it was a great experience to take the time to listen to the entire New Testament, to meditate on it. And it was a learning experience. So many times, I found myself finishing sentences. The word of God was familiar in many ways. But then there were also times when I remember thinking, “This is not familiar at all.” It might have been the different translations, or it might have just been a while, or it might be because I am a different person now than I was the last time I read it. There were other times when I was challenged, saying to myself, “Yes, keep doing more of this,” or saying to myself, “Oooo, you need to stop doing this,” and so on.

But, based on what the Lord says to Joshua here, I would encourage all of us to do what Joshua is told to do. As we work out, as we commute to school or work, as we sit around a firepit in the back yard, let us take some time this week to meditate on the word of God, day and night. It’s one way we **“keep seeking the things above”** (as Paul tells us to do in Colossians 3:1), it’s one way we dwell on **“whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute”** (as Paul tells us to do in Philippians 4:8), it’s the main way we allow ourselves to **“be transformed by the renewing of your mind”** (as Paul tells us to do in Romans 12:2). We meditate on the word of God.

II. The second big idea in this passage is that in addition to meditating on the word of God, we must also **“DO”** the word of God.

And this is repeated twice in this passage, as the purpose of meditation. In verse 8, concerning the Law, God says, **“you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to DO according to all that is written in it.”** And this is carried over from verse 7, where God says, **“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.”** In other words, meditating on the Law is not just a mental exercise, but it has a purpose. We let it sink in as we study, **“so that [we] may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.”** We are studying, not just to get a good grade on a test of some kind, but we study to actually change the way we live.

We think of what Jesus said about the wise and foolish builders at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24-27,

²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

Both men hear the word of God, but only one of them actually does something about it! In James 1, James tells us that if we look at the word of God but don’t change the way we live, we’re like a guy who looks in a mirror and perhaps sees something really gross hanging out of his nose, and then heads out the door without doing anything about it. We look at a mirror every morning for a reason. We look in a mirror for the purpose of doing something about what we see in it. In the same way, we meditate on God’s law in order to change the way we live.

Joshua, then, is to meditate on the word, but he is to also do something about it. He is to be careful to **“do”** it. And this is where we come to that little reminder, a special warning, in the middle of verse 7. Concerning the Law, God warns Joshua, **“Do not turn from it to the right or to the left.”** Most of us realize there are two main ways we can deviate from God’s law even today: On one hand, we can loosen God’s law (that is, we can ignore certain parts of it); but on the other hand, we can also go to the other extreme: We can tighten God’s law, making it more strict than it actually is, and this also is a great danger. We are not to relax God’s law, and we must not add to it. Both extremes are very dangerous. We are to meditate on the Law, and then we are to do it, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

And thinking back to Joshua’s challenge here, isn’t this amazing? Instead of God sharing some surprising new military tactic or some new weaponry as he leads these people into the Promised Land, God’s primary concern is that Joshua meditate on the word for the purpose of obeying it! Instead of training an army, Joshua’s main concern is to love God, to love his neighbor, and so on. Listen and obey. Meditate and then do.

III. Before we close today, let’s notice a third big idea, as God actually reminds Joshua three times in this passage to “BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS,” and what allows him to be strong and courageous is to remember that GOD IS WITH HIM.

To be **“strong and courageous”** is the idea of being “firm” or “bold,” to be a strong leader. And this strength will be needed. He’s leading up to 2 million people or even more, and everybody will have their own ideas of how things need to be done. But to deal with this, and with everything else, Joshua will need to be **“strong and courageous.”** And he can do this, because God promises to be with him through all of it.

Notice: God does not promise Joshua a trouble-free life, does he? No! God doesn’t promise that Joshua would live to a ripe old age and retire on his own private island. God doesn’t promise that Joshua would never get frustrated or exasperated. But God says, no matter what happens, **“I will be with you.”**

And for us, doesn’t this sound familiar? We think of our mission today, to take the gospel with us wherever we go. In Matthew 28:20, in giving that Great Commission, Jesus says, **“...and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** And so, like Joshua, we can face our mission with strength and courage, knowing that God will be with us.

In the same way, we may face other situations in our lives that might just wear us out – health issues, relationship issues, job issues, family issues – God has not promised to keep us from these things. I’ve had some calls from someone in another state over the past month or two, someone facing a terrible health struggle in the family, and she has said over and over again, “Surely, God would not allow this terrible thing to happen, would he?” And I’ve tried to give the reminder that sometimes terrible things happen to good people. Not that God causes those bad things to happen; but he has promised to be with us, hasn’t he? He’s with us when we are tempted to sin. He’s with us through the health struggles. He’s with us through the stress of everyday living, **“I will be with you,”** God says.

We think about the rest of Joshua’s life, and we see this promise fulfilled. If you’re still in Joshua 1, keep a finger there and turn over briefly, all the way to the end of the book, to Joshua 24:31. We fast-forward to the end of his life, and we see the mission accomplished. In Joshua 24:31, the summary is that, **“Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD which He had done for Israel.”** God, therefore, truly was with Joshua through all of it. His life wasn’t easy,

by any means, but God was with him, and he accomplished what God commanded him to do. Many times, what holds us back from doing what we meditate on is fear. I know this is what the Bible says, BUT... The Lord, though, promises to be with us, and this is what allows us to ***“be strong and courageous.”*** Remember: I will be with you.

Conclusion:

As we close, I would remind us that all of this is very practical. In fact, this passage is quoted in Hebrews 13:5, where the author says, ***“Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, ‘I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU.’”*** It’s not misapplying this, then, to apply God’s statement in Joshua to something like the everyday temptation to be tempted by stuff: Do not love money, be content with what you have, because God has promised to be with us. And that would go for just about any temptation, any challenge we face – we meditate on the word of God to see what he wants us to do, then we do it, and we face the challenge with strength and courage, knowing that God has promised to always be with us. The same God who was with Moses and Joshua, will also be with us. He will be with us personally, and he will also be with us as a congregation.

I know we started today by thinking about our transition from the school to this building. But we’re also in a time of transition right now, aren’t we? We’ve seen some huge changes over the past year and a half – not just with how we partake of the Lord’s Supper, but we’ve rearranged the times we meet. We’ve rearranged the order of worship. We’ve added some new ways to connect. We are missing some people right now. We have some new people with us today who weren’t here 20 years ago. But through everything, God has been with us, and he will continue being with us in the future – if we meditate on his word, if we do what his word tells us to do, and if we face each challenge with strength and with courage, knowing that he is with us.

I am so thankful for the good Christian sister who asked that we study this passage, and I hope it has been as encouraging to all of you as it has been to me.

Before we continue with the Lord’s Supper, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and awesome God, the God of Moses and Joshua, the God who has promised to always be with us. As we allow your word to change our hearts, we pray that we would stay in the word, that we would allow it to take root, and we pray that we would face each challenge in this life with courage and strength, knowing that you are always with us.

This morning, we ask you to be with Carson as he faces whatever comes next. We are thankful that you have blessed him with two good parents. And so we pray also for Bill and Norma Jean, that you would bless them with strength and courage, that you would give their entire family a sense of patient endurance. We pray that you would use all of us to be an encouragement in some way.

Thank you, Father, for Jesus. We come to you in his name. Lord, come quickly. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com