

ARE YOU READY? RESTORATION Joshua 1

I'd like to read the first nine verses. Please follow along as I read.

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

There is a starting place in this passage and it's a difficult place to start. It has to do with the judgment of God. God is bringing judgment to the people in the land. It's not a flippant, casual random response on the part of God. It's been coming for hundreds and hundreds of years. The people of the land had been taking part in child sacrifices, terrible immorality, atrocities to other people groups and other nations. And in an act of justice and judgment, God is removing those people from the land. He is giving the land to the children of Israel. And Moses, the servant of the

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Lord, perhaps the greatest leader of all time outside of Jesus himself, is being told to go in and take this land.

This is not the first time that God has told the children of Israel to do this. They were given this command, this opportunity 40 years earlier, and they shrank back in fear. They sent 12 spies into the land to spy out the land. When they came back, 10 of those spies said, “It’s just too difficult. We can’t do it. They are too established. The people of the land are too much,” so they disobeyed God. Then the judgment of God was placed upon that generation because of their lack of faith and disobedience to God. God told them, “You’ll wander in the wilderness for 40 years, and I’m going to remove an entire generation.”

I share this with you because, honestly, there would be a temptation to come to this passage and try to skirt around that difficult issue. The reality is that if I’m your pastor or if I’m standing to speak as a pastor, if I fall to that temptation, I do a great injustice to you. **The first truth that you need to know is that God judges sin.** God has basically two choices from a human perspective. Forgive this very simplistic, human explanation. But **God can either judge sin, which inevitably leads to wiping all of us out, or God can ignore sin and therefore as a result become sinful like us.**

God looked at those two alternatives and said, “It’s not an option for me not to judge sin, so I’m going to take all of my judgment and wrath against sin and I’m going to place it on myself in the person of my Son.” This is an amazing mercy of God, an amazing demonstration of the love of God – that Jesus, the Son of God would take my judgment upon himself.

The first truth, the starting place for us is that God judges sin. But there is another truth that’s on display here in this passage. It’s a very rich, redemptive theme, and that is that **God is bringing restoration to all things. From the moment mankind sinned and rejected God and fell from God’s grace, God set about to reclaim, to renovate, to restore, to resurrect his entire creation. What we are reading about in Joshua 1 is a portion of the plan of God as God is on his restoration project. God wants to restore your life. God wants to restore you completely. He not only wants to restore you and everything about you, he is calling you to be a part of his restoration. He is calling you on mission. He is calling you to be a part of reclaiming his universe for himself.**

So when we read in this passage God telling Joshua to go and take the land, I want you to think about now your place in the history of God and the call of God on your life to go and possess and to reclaim and to restore as God calls you to that very dramatic calling.

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If you've been here for any length of time, you've probably heard me reference this chapter. I think about the third or fourth, maybe the fifth time God tells Joshua: "Don't be afraid," if I'm Joshua, I'm really afraid. "Be strong, be very courageous." There are times when you need to hear this word: "Be strong. Be courageous." **What God has for you and what God wants to do in your life will not come easily. It will take spiritual battle. It will take faith. It will take strength. It will take perseverance.**

Many of you I think, today even, find yourself in a battle. There are ups and downs in that battle, and some days you feel like you're winning. Some days you feel like you're running. Be strong. Be very courageous. That's the word of the Lord to us. But it's not the only word of the Lord in this passage. You are really in trouble if you don't hear the whole passage, because the reason God can say to Joshua, the reason God can say to you, "Be strong and very courageous," is because God says, "I am with you. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. Everywhere you go, in taking that which I have for you, I am with you."

So God gives us this command, but he gives us this promise. In fact, **I really want to look at this passage in terms of what God requires of you and what God promises to do.** Let's look at it in these two parts, if we could. **First, what you must do.**

I. **What you must do.**

I'm going to give it to you in four points and I'm going to keep it really simple so that we can grab ahold of it.

- 1. Go!**
- 2. Be in the Word.**
- 3. Obey.**
- 4. Unity.**

Go! He tells Joshua, "Go, possess the land," and this very descriptive phrase, "every place that you set your foot I'm going to give to you, but you have to go." Very clearly, he tells them to be in the word of God, to meditate on the word of God, to mutter, to repeat to yourself over and over, to

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meditate upon, to reflect upon the word of God. He tells them to obey the word of God, to do God's word.

Then there is a final word on unity. I didn't read the entire chapter, but after the portion that we read, Joshua begins to assemble the people and prepare them to go in. There are two and a half tribes that have already possessed their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. He goes to those two and a half tribes and says, "Listen, you cannot stay here and stay comfortable while we go in to possess what God has promised to all of us. You have to go with us." And they said, "Yeah, we are with you. We will go with you."

It's an important message, that when we understand God's call on our lives, it's not just an individualistic call. God is not just restoring me personally, he is restoring us. He wants us to take everyone with us. It's helpful to understand that everywhere in my life, where I am holding onto exclusive language that is not exclusive in Christ, but in other subjective things, that I should be careful. God calls us to do these four things. He commands us to do these four things.

There is a play that is just coming out. It's a one-person play, actually on bravery. It's called *Accidentally Brave*. It's written by Maddie Corman, who is about 50 years of age. She's an actress. Years ago, Maddie had been married for a number of years and had a teenage daughter. While driving she received a call from her daughter who told her that her dad, Maddie's husband, had been arrested for the unthinkable. The FBI had shown up, taken everything, and he'd been arrested for child pornography.

The story that is told in this one-person play, *Accidentally Brave*, is her autobiography of that experience. She tells about picking up her husband when he is released on bond, picking him up on a street corner in Brooklyn, and asking him: "Is it true?" He says, "Yes, it's true." Then she asks him a second question: "Have you touched anyone?" He says no, he swears that he hasn't. She punches him, pulls over and throws up.

Her story is entitled *Accidentally Brave* because over and over as the years progress, she chooses to try to get help for her husband and restore her marriage, and today they are together. (Spoiler alert, if you go see the play.) I thought about this woman and here's what grabbed me as I read a little bit about her story. As the play was about to be released, she said, "You know, people have said the dumbest things to me. They text the most ridiculous things. But the one thing that was told to her over and over and over again was, 'You are so brave. You are so brave.'"

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But she said, “Actually what I feel is fear. I feel so much fear, because I’m trying to do this, I’m trying to tell my story, I’m trying to seek restoration, and I’m afraid of how this is going to affect my kids. Will this make it even more difficult for them? Will this look like I’m somehow condoning what my husband has done?” And this actress, this author, was part of the #Me Too movement. She was a victim of a sexual attack. She was one of nine women that came out publicly against a playwright.

Then she had this fear: Is this going to undermine what I’ve tried to do, as I’ve tried to expose this abuse of authority? You could feel the emotion of it, the courage it takes just to stay engaged in the battle. So for you, I want to tell you there is not a call here to be accidentally brave. **There is a call here to be intentionally brave, to know the nature of the battle before you get into it and to know what it is that you are to do, and to know what is there for your benefit to help you. We have to go. We have to step out.**

William Wilberforce -- you may be familiar with the story of his life. He probably, more than any other individual, single-handedly (though he partnered with many, many people) ended slavery in Great Britain. It was a lifelong pursuit for him. It took him 46 years. He was a politician. His entire political career was spent fighting the African slave trade. He actually won the battle on his deathbed. As he landed in the deathbed, a bed he would not rise from, he received word of victory on the day he died. Three days later it was signed into law.

It’s an amazing story, but what many people don’t know about William Wilberforce is that his entire life was given to a pursuit of helping people. At one moment in his life, he was involved in 69 initiatives to do good to others. He was not a one-issue candidate. It cost him politically because he gave his life to this pursuit. Many thought that Wilberforce would be the youngest Prime Minister ever in the history of Great Britain. It didn’t happen. He never became Prime Minister, largely because of his alignment with this one purpose to end slavery. His best friend, William Pitt, did become the youngest Prime Minister ever.

It was said by one of his close friends that Wilberforce was as fatal to dullness as he was to immorality. He himself said, “No man has a right to be idle.” His life, all these decades, hundreds of years later, stands to you and me and says, “Listen, in a world where there is so much suffering, so much pain, so much misery – go. Go and give your life in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and helping hurting people.” We have to go.

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I understand that scripture tells us that sometimes we are to wait on God. We even celebrate it today, resting in the presence of God, resting on the promises of God, waiting on God. It's a strong biblical truth. But let me offer a word of interpretation of that here. When we talk about waiting, the warning here is not getting out in front of God or doing something that God isn't yet doing. It just means believing, standing, knowing that God is doing what he promised to do, and take the next step. **But don't create steps that God is not actually inviting you to do.**

Let me just say a word about this “be in the word” and “obey the word.” First, what God will do.

II. What God will do.

1. God gives you his promises.

2. God gives you his word.

3. God gives you his presence.

Let's move through this quickly.

Go be in the word, obey, unity. Notice Joshua 1:8. This is a key verse for us. This is a little strange, right? You are a military leader. You are about to go into battle, and this is the strategy that God gives you. “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” He says, “Listen, focus on my word. Get in my word. Obey my word. Do what I've commanded you. Follow me. This is what is essential for you to win the battle.”

Had I personally been giving Joshua instructions, I would have said, “Listen, Joshua, there are a lot of things to be afraid of. Be careful. Be careful. Don't get too close to the wall when you go up to Jericho. Have a good battle plan.” This is generally the style my parenting takes. “Son, daughter, you have no idea what's out there. You need to be careful. You have every reason to be afraid. You should run for your life.”

It's such a danger to raise a bunch of cowards, right? It's true in church life. It's true in family. It's true in work. It's true in every arena. There is a place where we have to release people to go even

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though they're going to fall. What we really need to tell them is: "Know the word of God and obey the word of God." Here are a few verses to reinforce this.

Psalm 119:105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." God gives direction. In the cloudiness, in the haziness of "What do I do in the midst of the battle?" God's word gives me direction. Wilberforce memorized the entire psalm – the longest chapter in all of the Bible and he would quote it every day as he walked home from Parliament to his place of residence. He would quote the entire psalm. It took him about the length of his trip to get through it. The theme of Psalm 119 is the word of God.

2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The scripture is God's word for you and me. There is this picture where we are told that it's profitable for teaching. It tells us how to live.

Just picture this straight line, then when we fall off of this line, it's profitable for reproof. It rebukes us and says, "You know what? You're not on God's path. You're off God's path. But it doesn't leave us there. It corrects us. It shows us how to get back onto God's path. Then instruction in righteousness.

There is this picture. This is how we live when we get off of the path. It comes to us as this warning, this rebuff. It redirects us then tells us how to get back on God's path, then gives us clear instruction on how we should live. **We are to go. We are to be in the word. We are to obey the word. And we are not to do this just individualistically. We are to do it as a part of the family of God that we are a part of.**

Now, if we just did part one, we would be in big trouble. But we need the promises of God, the word of God, and the presence of God. What is amazing to me is that God begins this conversation with Joshua with a promise that is about 500 years old, a promise initially given to Abraham. **He says, "Listen, my word is true. I always fulfil my word. Stand on my promises."**

There is a little bit of work that we have to do sometimes when we think about the promises of God. There is a place where you need to be careful. In the first battle Joshua goes in. They are told to march around Jericho seven days in a row, then on the seventh day they are to march seven times. They are given all this specific instruction about how God wants to bring the victory. There is a

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whole lesson there. I don't think you're supposed to read about the battle of Jericho, then every time you want something you do a little Jericho march. Right?

You're down at the car dealer walking around seven days, seventh day seven times. It's probably not a promise given to you for that purpose. There is a place, though, where you glean the promises of God and you see the character of God revealed, even in what he told Joshua to do at Jericho, and you stand on that. You stand on who God is and how that's applied to your life. There's a place where you can say, "God, you will provide. You have promised it. You will never leave me. You will show me what I need. Your promises are true."

It's not just that we have God's promises. And it's not just that we are to meditate on the word and obey the word, but the word itself is the power of God coming into our lives. We read, for example, in Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

It's so helpful when we find ourselves in life progressing through and all of the ups and downs, where God's word will just come to us and reveal what's going on in our hearts, reveal to us things that we have no other way of knowing that are happening in the situation. We humbly receive from God by the power of God's word.

You probably tire of hearing me say how many times in my relationship with my wife or with one of my kids, I'd be before the Lord, going through some scripture, and God's word would just pierce and penetrate and reveal and expose and convict and humble and say, "Listen, you are blind to your own words, your own attitudes, your own tone, your own pride, your own insufficiency. You are actually not the solution, Brian, right now. You're the problem."

The glorious freedom that comes when you are there in that place and you say, "God, forgive me. I receive forgiveness because of the promise of Jesus Christ. All of the judgment that I deserve was poured out on him, and I am forgiven because of what he has done." Even the joy to know that in raising my kids and in being a pastor, whatever the sphere is, to say, "It's ultimately on you, Lord. **You have promised and you are faithful. I will stand on these promises.**"

When I hit 40 two or three years ago, I had this incident where I collapsed in the middle of the night. Paramedics showed up. I told them I had the flu. They told me I was an idiot, that I didn't have the flu, and to stop diagnosing myself. They told me maybe I had some cardiac problems. I went

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through a bunch of tests. It was the most unsettling thing. We didn't know what it was. I went home and I was lying in bed at night, wondering, "Am I okay? Is it beating? Is it going to stop beating?" This was the fear that attacked me. It wasn't so much dying. It was: "My kids! Will they be okay?" Right? Now, I didn't want to die. I'll be honest with you; I wasn't ready. There are days now where it seems more attractive. I got an "Amen, brother! Yes, preach it!"

The Lord is so kind. The presence of God... The Lord met me one night (I can't even explain it), saying, "I am a better Father than you will ever be. And if I choose to take you, I will raise your kids." I told Beth that the next morning at breakfast. She was like, "Shut up!" Right?! God is faithful, friend. You can't do this. You can't obey God. Here's the problem: **You must obey God! And you can't. But you must! You will if you'll stand on the promises of God. And when you fail (and you will), you confess and you get up.**

But there's a problem if I tell you, "Okay, you're going to fail. Jesus has done it." Listen, I don't want to remove the sting from you that tells you: "Hold to the word of God." Right now mom, right now dad: Your kids know if you stand on the word of God. Yeah, you're very imperfect in how you keep it, but they know whether or not the word of God is the foundation for your life and your home. If it's not, here's the beauty of the good news of Jesus Christ: **Repent, confess, repent to them, and start over in Jesus.**

Let me just give you this verse before we end. "But we have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways." This is Paul talking about his own ministry. He says, "We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." Right now, I want to take this top sentence and just announce it to the entire Church in the western world: **"For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."**

Can I tell you about a movement right now? Because of social media, we are telling pastors: "You are the brand, and you have to build your brand." When Christian authors go to publishers, many times Christian publishers are saying to those authors, "Listen, we won't even look at a book to publish by you unless you have so many followers on social media."

I just want to say that they would not have published the Apostle Paul, because he refused to be the brand. **You are not the brand – it's Jesus.** "We proclaim not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord,

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with ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake." Now grab ahold of this: "'For God who said let shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

In a nutshell, the word of God that spoke the worlds into existence, now the word of God that you unfold in the scriptures speaks, and God creates. And as you see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, God's power fills your inner being. Stay close to the word of God, that Christ might be revealed, that you might receive his power. **For all the promises of God find their yes in him.** We sang that today. All the promises that we stand on are yes in him.

Let me end with this. Flannery O'Connor tells a story about two little girls. The nun at the convent where they went to school told them that they were the temple of the Holy Spirit. These two little girls made fun and mocked what the nun had said. They left saying, "Oh, you're the temple of the Holy Spirit. You're temple #1. I'm temple #2." They ridiculed the nun and made fun of what she was saying.

They came home and they were really vain. They were boy crazy, young teenagers, as Flannery O'Connor tells the story. They went to a fair. In that day there was a terrible practice where certain people that were different would be paraded in front of others to gawk at. So these two little girls went into one of these tents and there was someone who was terribly disfigured. This person stood on the stage, and in her own words she proclaimed the truth that the nun had proclaimed. She said, "Listen, don't laugh at me. This is the way God made me. Don't laugh at me. I'm a child of God." Right there is this powerful contrast of someone who thinks this is a truth to be ridiculed, but someone else who knows the deepest rejection is saying, I am a child of God." The word of God brings transformation.

Those two little girls go home and go to bed that night. There is a younger girl in the room and you don't even realize that she is of any consequence to the whole story. She is mean. She is super smart, maybe smarter than all the rest, but very spiteful. She has experienced a lot of rejection herself. She hears the girls making fun: "I'm the temple of the Holy Spirit, temple #1, temple #2." She hears all of that then she hears the story about this disfigured woman. And this little girl, as she hears this convoluted testimony from the word of God, with tears running down her face, begins saying, "I'm the temple of the Holy Spirit. I'm a child of God." She imagines a whole celestial choir singing over her: "You are the temple of the Holy Spirit."

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God is renovating. He is restoring human lives. He is restoring his creation. When we talk about God's word, God's promises, God's presence -- that culminates now with the Holy Spirit of God Almighty living in you. You are the temple of the Holy Spirit, now marshalled to go forward to be a part of the restoration that God calls us to. Let's bow our heads.