

Part 1: The Possibility of Faithful Rest

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As Tyler just read, we are going to be walking together through the first chapter in the book of Joshua. This book is a part of what is often referred to as a historical text of the Bible. Meaning, a narrative book, a book that tells a story. More specifically the story of Israel, the people of God, and Joshua, their leader. We are going to read this story, and try and understand the significance of what is physically taking place. But we also want to understand the meaning of what is happening, and what it means for 21st century Christians like us.

It's important we locate ourselves in this history and story, before we actually try to dig in to what's really going on here. The people that we are going to read about this morning, their story really begins in Exodus, as captives, as slaves in the land of Egypt. However these people were special because God had singled them out as his people. People that love and worship and obey him, and he would guide them and protect them and bless them and bless the earth through them. And yet they were slaves.

Until, Moses led them out of it. The man God chose to be his messenger and the leader of these people. Moses became the guy that God would speak through, often speaking to the political leaders of Egypt, warning them about keeping Israel enslaved. It was then through Moses that God worked supernatural plagues to befall Egypt, until they released the Israel as slaves. As they left Egypt, it was through his raised hand on the shores of the Red Sea that it literally parted as Israel escaped Egypt's shackles. As they ventured across dry and barren deserts, it was through Moses that God gave his people manna and quail, and water.

Through Moses, God was leading this people out of Egypt and slavery, and in doing so was also leading in to a particular place, the Promised Land. A place promised to their ancestor Abraham, a place that they were being led to by Moses.

They soon arrived at the precipice of the land God was going to give them, and yet, when God instructed them to prepare for entry, and prepare to take the land of promise, they got scared. They became fearful. Their fear overcame their belief in the promises of God. All but two of their representatives, feared the nations that occupied the land, more than they feared and believed in God. As a consequence for their lack of faith, God made the whole of the nation to wander the desert for 40 years, specifically, until an entire generation passed away, including Moses. So all those who were delivered from the bondage of slavery would not see the kingdom that God had promised to them. Except for two. The two men that had faith in God as they arrived at the land they were to conquer: Caleb and Joshua.

Which brings us to this moment, in **Joshua 1:1**. Moses dies. Marking the moment that God had orchestrated, a generation has passed, Moses, the leader, prophet, mediator, the great Moses passes away. That is the moment in history we find our story. This is the anchor point this morning.

The story of Joshua 1 this morning has three parts to it, three different addresses. We see God speaking to Joshua, Joshua speaking to the people, and the people speaking to Joshua. And as we try to uncover

the meaning of this story, and what it means to us, we're going to see three things: **1) The Faithfulness of God; 2) Our Faithful Work; 3) A Faithful Hope.**

The Faithfulness of God. Moses has just passed away, their great leader, their great prophet, and God replaces this great man that led them out of their darkest circumstances. **Joshua 1:2-4**

This is God giving Joshua the reigns, leadership and responsibility over his people, a new mediator, a new general. In the face of the death of their leader, God gives Joshua leadership in this moment of transition. This moment of change for the people.

They've been in the desert for 40 years, the generation of people that came out of Egypt have passed, so most of the people he's talking about leading here, are the children and grandchildren of former slaves. Their whole lives have been spent as nomads in the wilderness. And now they are expected to pick everything up, and go conquer the lands of people bigger, stronger and more organized and with more battle experience than these, sons and daughters of former slaves.

The circumstances here aren't exactly ideal for a people who just lost the miracle working leader that talked to God on a mountain and turned a bunch of slaves into an organized civil society. What a challenging moment. What a hard time for these people. What a challenging time for Joshua. He just lost his mentor, his friend. The man that led and taught him, the man he served.

But as hard as it probably was in that moment, I imagine it was probably a little exciting too? These are the kids and grandkids, remember, most of them weren't there for plagues in Egypt or the parting of the sea. They haven't witnessed the vast power of their God over other nations that stand opposed to them. They've only heard the stories and histories. So to be at the starting line of whole new adventure for your people under the kind and powerful rule of God, there must've been a little anticipation too.

Kind of a paradox of emotion: mourning at the loss of their great leader, fear at the prospect of war with powerful people; yet excitement that they will get to finally witness and participate in the mighty works of their God, anticipation of finding a home instead of wandering in the wilderness.

After all the waiting, after all the stories, after all the anticipation, after the loss of Moses, they finally stand on the doorstep of something they've only ever imagined or heard stories of. Harper is the name of my daughter. She's almost 15 months now. Just over a year ago, I remember Jess and I, standing on the doorstep of something really special. And even, before that, when we found out we were pregnant. So much excitement. We'd been hoping God would give a little boy or a little girl for a long time. We so pumped. Seeing the ultrasound, finding out she was girl, giving her her name. The anticipation of meeting little Harper Mae. And yet, so much fear, life was going to change for us forever. Gosh the terror of being entirely responsible for the very life of another soul. Perhaps you have had an experience similar, where the anticipation and excitement of a moment was married to fear and dread. Graduation maybe. A move across the country. Getting Married.

The idea of change and transition is built into the human experience at this point. For good or bad, seasons of life change. Jess and I went from a married couple to a married couple with a kid. City buys that land your church is built on, and you have to find a new home. You graduate high school, and move to a city you visited once last spring for 3 days. Your leader and prophet and friend dies, and you are now expected to lead an entire nation of people into a land occupied by violent and well armed

enemies. And in those moments, you can't help but wonder, 'what is this going to be like?' and 'will we be ok?'

Fortunately for us, and fortunately for Joshua and the Israelites, God isn't hands free when it comes to his creation or his promises. Let's read on in **Joshua 1:5-9**.

Amidst these drastic shifting of circumstances God doesn't abandon his people. After the death of their great prophetic leader, the one who talked to Yaweh, He doesn't leave them to fend for themselves, he doesn't leave them to figure it out on their own. Moses may have died, a generation of fathers and mothers have passed, and yet their God does not abandon them. Verse 5, "Just as I was with Moses, so shall I be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you." God promises to be with them. Present. Faithful. Faithful to do exactly what he promised Abraham and Moses he would do.

Then verse 6, "Be strong and courageous." These are the famous verses in Joshua. The ones we see burned into wood signs in craft stores, etched into coffee mugs, and written in bios on Facebook. It is only because God is faithful, that Joshua can be strong and courageous. It is precisely because God is never wavering in his promises that Joshua can find the strength and courage to remain obedient to God.

God's command to Joshua for strength and courage isn't a command to some stubborn willfulness in the face of battle odds or a defiant people. It isn't finding strength or courage in his own ability to lead or his own tactics as a general. The strength of Joshua is believing God. Believing God when he says he will be there. Believing God when he says he will not leave or abandon Joshua. Believing God when he says I will give you this land.

We read these verses through our western eyes, and we think about courage in battle, strength and will and war, determination in the face of fear or uncertainty. Maybe strength and courage are things like integrity, good character in hard circumstances. Kindness when being bullied. Care and sacrifice for our friends, or for our families. Certainly many of those things are good. Often those are actually obedient things.

But the strength and courage God is talking about on those wood burned signs and hand etched coffee mugs has more to do with who God is and what he has promised to do, than who we are and what we think we can do. More times than not, our problem isn't that we don't think we are strong enough, it's that we don't God is strong enough.

True strength and courage comes in believing in the promises of God, regardless of whether circumstances are static or fluid. Whether you are in a season of comfort and security, or in a season of change and transition, God will always remain faithful. For those who believe in Jesus, God will always be after our good. Even when all we can see is the terror in the hard moments, if we would just believe and trust that God is good, there is rest in those moments. God will never waver in his commitment to his glory, he will never waver in his love and promise to deliver his people.

Joshua's strength and courage is in his faith in believing God, and it's also in his obedience to the word of God. **Joshua 1:7-8**

In this unique moment in the history of Israel, God commissions Joshua. Promises to be with him, to deliver him, to give him land. God doesn't commission Joshua to lead apart from Joshua's faithful

commitment to God. Joshua's obedience to God. Joshua's fulfillment of the mission God has given him is dependent upon the presence and promise of God. Yet he is still given a task of obedience and faithfulness himself. God knows what Joshua's is feeling, what he is experiencing right now. How hard it must be on his heart. Joshua's faithfulness is first dependent on God's faithfulness. Joshua's obedience is a response to the guarantee that God will always be with Joshua.

God's promise to Joshua is also a promise to us **Hebrews 13:5-6**. When your circumstances shift God will be with you. When our building is taken away, when a birth changes your life, when you leave college and don't know what to do with yourself or where you fit in, God's promise to you is the same promise he made to Joshua. "I will never leave you or forsake you." "wherever you go, I go."

But as with Joshua, the other side of God's faithfulness to us, is our faith in him and obedience to him. You can't separate the two. Joshua couldn't separate the mission God gave him, and the promise of God to be with him. We cannot do that either. We cannot take the promise of God's kind faithfulness, and separate it from our responsibility to the commission God has given us, namely an all out and utter pursuit of his glory, regardless of whether our circumstances are ideal or not.

We cannot put these verses on mugs and signs and Facebook, expect to live our best life, and separate the good promises of God from our responsibility to pursue God and his glory. As if God exists to satisfy us.

If that's what you think or how you live, then one of two things will happen. 1) you will make it through whatever challenge that you face, and your faith will become all about you, a means to some end of happiness or joy or satisfaction; 2) you will go through a tough season of temptation or broken circumstances, you won't come out the other side in one piece, and you'll be frustrated, and angry, and bitter, because you'll say God wasn't with you. We cannot separate God's faithfulness to deliver his people, and his call of obedience on those same people. Whether they be Israelites or Christians.

Which leads us into the next part of our story in Joshua 1, **Our Faithful Work**. Moses has died, but the promises of God have not died with him. Though it may seem that way to Israel. God is faithful, and appoints and commissions Joshua to replace Moses. First we saw God speaking to Joshua, now we see Joshua speaking to the people. **Joshua 1:10-11**.

As much as these were trying and depressing and hard times for the leader Joshua, it was equally as challenging for the people of Israel. Remember, these are the children and grandchildren of the generation led out of Egypt. Their whole life has been spent as wanderers in the wilderness, hearing stories of the past works of God and Moses, looking forward to the deliverance of the land and life God promised them.

Joshua immediately takes up the role that God set him upon. To lead Israel into the land that God was going to give them. He speaks to all of Israel to prepare. To get ready. Remember the last time they were this close to a home and destination, most of them lost faith and trust in God, and they were sent to wander. Joshua gives them three days to equip themselves, pack their homes, their provisions, grab your weapons and water skins. Because the destination of promise, their land, their rest, is just on the other side of the river. The moment of promise is just across this river.

There is often too little meaning to the post cross Christian, reading about the actual fulfillment of a promise of some specific land somewhere in the middle east to an ancient people removed from the

internet by thousands of years. But the writer of Hebrews seems to think it should matter **Hebrews 3:12-19**. This is the New Testament writer of Hebrews describing the very circumstances of Israel and the death of Moses. A letter to a church written after the gospel was realized in the life of Jesus. **Hebrews 4:1-3a**. The writer of Hebrews draws a line from Israel to the Christian. He equates the circumstances of Israel to ours.

To Israel, God was going to deliver to them rest in their destination of promise, it would be a season of struggle, of change, of transition. There would be war, and loss, and tragedy, and struggle. It would stretch them so much beyond their capacity that the only way to the other side was a strength and confidence not in themselves or their ability, but in the God that promised he would deliver them.

God has also made that promise to Christians: to deliver us to a destination of promise and rest. There will be seasons of struggle, of war against sin, and seasons where that sin seems overwhelming. Maybe you're realizing that your sin plays a larger role in your life than you thought. Maybe your beginning to question whether God actually is faithful; that he is still there for you. Maybe your just so frustrated with your own lack of growth and sanctification, you've kind of given up on taking it so seriously. Like Israel, the only way to the other side is a strength and courage not in yourself, not in your willpower, not in your wit or intelligence, not in your piety; but in the God that promises to deliver his people, and for us that's through Jesus.

The destination of rest for the people of God through Joshua was a land he promised them a thousand years prior to Abraham. The destination of rest for the people of God through Jesus is an eternity he promised us in the gospel. Holding the promise of Hebrews and Joshua together can be a special kind of assurance amidst the hardest times. For those that trust in Jesus there is unique peace in the gospel because an eternity of promised rest awaits us.

But sometimes for Christians who have that assurance, it's easy to take it for granted. Or enter this state of self focus. Where all we can see is me and mine. What concerns us in ourselves, our families, and those closest to us. In other words, the sin and circumstances we war and struggle against, only concern us when they affect us. Sometimes we can twist that confidence and assurance into complacency. Joshua warns a group of Israelites against that kind of complacency and apathy. **Joshua 1:12-15**

The reason that Joshua singles these two and a half tribes out, is because God has already given them their rest, their land of promise. As God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and up to the promised land, these tribes found land they really liked. So God gave the land to them to settle and live. Under a condition. That when the time came for the rest of Israel to go into the hostile lands across the Jordan, these three tribes would fight alongside their brothers, the rest of Israel, and fight on their behalf, for the rest that God had promised them.

Joshua is reminding them of the oath they made, to fight for the land and the rest of their brothers. Sometimes the assurance of eternity for the Christian can make us complacent and apathetic. I mean, we've got our rest, right? Our guarantee of inheritance in Jesus. We've been promised an eternity of joy and happiness and peace.

Earlier, we couldn't separate the strength and courage that God gives us, from the mission God also gives us to glorify him. Nor can we separate the promised rest of God in our eternity and salvation, from our responsibility and concern for the rest and eternity and salvation of our brothers and sisters. In the same promise, is God's promise to deliver and our promise to fight for our neighbors?

If you feel like you've arrived at a place of comfort in your walk with the Lord. Maybe God has graciously helped you successfully wrestle with sin and conflict in your life. Is God speaking to you through the story of these three tribes? They left their families and their livestock and their rest to go to literal war, risking their lives, that their neighbor might experience the same delivered promise that they have. How far are you willing to go to love your neighbor? What is it worth to you to walk through the trenches of someone else's struggles, and encourage them in the gospel rest Jesus has already given you? What is it worth to you to step outside your zone of comfort, and share the gospel with a friend or neighbor? Our war isn't against foreign powers that occupy land, but our war is against the sin occupies the real estate in our hearts. And that kind of discipleship and care and evangelism can often be just as costly.

The three tribes then respond to Joshua. **A Faithful Hope.** Joshua reminds them not only of their responsibility to God, but also their responsibility to their brothers, and they respond with devotion and unity. **Joshua 1:16-18.** Those last words, "Only be strong and courageous." Almost, as if they're talking to Joshua. It's almost as if their telling, or asking, Joshua to be strong, to be courageous.

Which would make sense, right? Look at **Joshua 1:17.** Now I don't seem to remember that being the case. Isn't it precisely because of their fear and disobedience that they are on this side of the Jordan in the first place? Wasn't it because of their dissatisfaction and discontentment that Moses struck the rock for water rather than speak to it. These Israelites aren't exactly known for their unwavering obedience.

It's almost as if they couldn't obey or remain faithful on their own. It's almost as if they need someone else to be strong for them. To have courage on their behalf. In *this* story, Joshua is the mediator. The one who God talks to, the one that leads them. That carries their burdens. That leads them into battle, and fights for them. The one that God himself set aside to be the strength and courage that Israel didn't have. Joshua was the one to carry them through a tumultuous season of hard and difficult change and transition. The hope of Israel was in the faithfulness of their leader. The faithfulness of their leader to obey and trust in God.

Mercifully, God has given Christians a mediator too. A leader and high priest of our own. One who is strong and courageous for us as well. Jesus is the one leading us into the Promised Land. A powerful and mighty king who fought the greatest battle against sin and won. Who now empowers us to fight the lingering remnants of the sin that occupies our hearts, and to help our neighbors in that same fight?

The hope of Israel was in the faithfulness of their leader, and the hope of the Christian is in the faithfulness of our leader, King Jesus. Jesus said this to his disciples. **Matthew 28:19-20.** I will be with you always. Same promise God made to Joshua. Another promise made with a specific role for us. Make disciples.

Fall is always a season of change and transition. This fall particularly. Jesus promise in every season is to be with us. We can move forward and trust that Jesus is behind every hard and costly decision because he has promised us he will be there. A promise that doesn't minimize the role he has called us to in faithfully following him and helping others follow him. God is faithful when things are good, when things are hard. God is faithful in seasons of comfort, and seasons of change. So trust and obey. Trust that he is good, and obey his call to the role and mission he has given us.

