

## Obedient Faith

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We're beginning a new sermon series in the book of Joshua. There are a lot of reasons we for this. 1) Since the Old Testament is often misunderstood, and seems so out of step with life today, it's important to know how to read it. 2) It shows us how people persevere through opposition and adversity. 3) It raises serious questions on topics like holy war, genocide, imperialism, and injustice. But before we get to all of that, I'd like to give you an overview of the first nine verses that present a kind of vision for the Christian life. Even if you're not a Christian, it should inspire you. Here it is: *God calls us to a more obedient faith because he is a shockingly good God of promise*, and it's embedded in three images: Land, Courage, Presence.

### Land

One thing immediately jumps off the page—God is calling his people to *more*. More what? Several things, for one more to eat. They've been living off manna and meat for forty years. Can you imagine? Foodie purgatory! But when they cross into the Canaan, the Promised Land, their diet changes, "[And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land...but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year](#)" (5:12; 24:13). More to eat, and more space to do it in, a place to call their own. Some of you feel confined in your apartment, but imagine circling the barren desert living out of dusty tents for decades, what it's like for our Syrian refugee friends arriving in Turkey, where they are given clothes, shelter, baby food, dignity, all because of our partnership with Emmanuel Church in Turkey. A place to call their own. More to eat, more of a home, but above all more of God. As they step out in faith to possess the Land, they will witness more of God's power, faithfulness, and love. Much more. But to get more of God, they must exercise obedient faith—cross the raging Jordan, march around the citadel of Jericho (while mocked), face overwhelming military odds, endure battles with the Canaanites. See, biblical faith isn't passive, wishful thinking; it's active trust in God's promises. And if they exercise obedient faith, *they will get more of God*. The same is true for us. The more we step out in obedient faith to do more, the more we will get of God. I think of my friend who was disappointed more skeptics weren't coming to his church. So, he decided to post on Meet Up that he wanted to meet up at a pub to talk with skeptics about the claims of Christianity. He ended up meeting several and a couple of them showing interest. But the less we risk, the less we will receive from the Lord. Faith connects us to more. Are you playing it safe or increasing in faith? Now, in Joshua the promise of more largely revolves this idea of Land. The Lord says to Joshua, their leader, "[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](#)" (2-3). And in verse 4, he describes the boundaries of the land. As modern Americans, this obsession with land can be hard to fathom. Why the Land? Two primary reasons. First, this is a promise that stretches back hundreds of years to Abraham, who in Genesis 15 enters into a covenant with God where these same boundaries are promised. And now hundreds of years later, God is about to make good on his promise. He's keeping a promise. But why a *land*? Well, it isn't really about the land. As we move through Joshua, we'll follow Israel's conquest to secure the

land. And what you need to know as we watch this unfold is that the land is where God determined to place his name. It's programmatic in Deuteronomy, book just before Joshua, "But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there" (Deut 12:5). His name is the place of his habitation, where he dwells. Can you think of another place he did this? Eden, where he walked in the cool of the day and humanity flourished. In other ANE cultures, when kings took a land it wasn't just for greed *it was for their god*. They would immediately build a temple or city in the land to signify his presence and rule, the place where the god dwells. Under Joshua's leadership, Israel follows a similar path, *but with a major difference*. This is no tribal deity. This is YHWH, the Creator God who rules not just Canaan but the whole world. Unlike the nations' many gods, he claims to be the one, true God and to rule the *all* the land. So by placing his name in the land, YHWH is rebooting Eden, setting up a microcosm of what the world was meant to be, before we messed it up. He is establishing a beachhead of creational order, human flourishing, and justice. Israel is to be a light to the nations. So how do modern Xns relate to this? The Church is the next chapter, the proof that it worked and that it didn't work. It did work because there are YHWH worshipping Christians in just about every nation. It didn't work because Israel abandoned God, so the God had to come and bear their punishment to put his presence, not just in the land but in them. And so we bear his name, *Christ-ians*, the place where Christ dwells through his Spirit. *Local churches are to be a microcosm of what it looks like when God dwells with his people*. Communities where he has placed his name. So here's a **question**: Are you in a community where people can tell God has put his name? Or are you more consumed with your name? Your clout, convenience, career, appearance? Or are you living for *his* name? Unless we break ties with living for our name, we won't get *more*, more of God, more of his people, and more of his mission. And the world won't truly flourish.

## Courage

Courage. God says to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them" (1:6). He repeats the phrase three times. It's actually two different words that mean to exercise strength, to make an effort, to be brave about your faith not squeamish. It's popular right now to be brave about—gender, sexuality, admitting insecurities and failures. But all this bravery *can* fall short if it's just for your name. So you are *seen* as brave. God's point isn't for you to be seen but for him to be seen. Are you brave about your deepest convictions, about the one, true God? Christianity without courage is like men without chests (CSL). Be strong and courageous or you and your neighborhood won't see more of God. But isn't this expectation just for leaders? I mean, I'm no Joshua. Actually, this command was first given to Israel, "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you" (Dt 31:6). Sometimes we draw a line between what we are called to and what leaders are called to, but in fact, God calls all people to bear his name, to courageously live by faith, to ask him for *more*, so his kingdom will come. There are just stiffer penalties for leaders who fail. But what if I'm going through a hard time, or work is demanding, or grieving a loss? Israel just lost their epic leader, Moses. And after an *appropriate* time of grieving, and there is a time for this, God says Joshua, it's time, "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you

and all this people” (1:2). Don’t linger in sorrow over what you’ve lost—a job, a friend, a reputation, a loved one. Take heart, God has called you and put his name on you. He is not done with you yet. Why does Israel need courage? To face incredible odds. Getting more of God doesn’t come without opposition. The really good things in life require effort. The Jordan river is quite deep, 100 feet in places, and this time of year it overflows. On the other side, an unknown land filled with Canaanite enemies and fortified cities. I’m just part of a nomadic religious group. When we face odds we need *true courage*, which looks at the odds and over its shoulder *to the towering God of promise* and says, we can do this. True courage is driven by God’s promise not my power. Are you attempting anything that requires courage? That requires God to show up? If we aren’t stretching to attempt things beyond our capacity, then we care more about our reputation than God’s reputation. God is calling us, City Life, to *more*. More of Christ, more of his church, and more of his mission. What will you attempt this year that requires prayer? For some, coming to worship most Sundays; others, giving a consistent percentage of income to see the gospel spread, others serving the city in mercy ministry, becoming a leader, starting a CG, praying your neighbors, taking a class, sharing the gospel. *More*. Sufjan Stephens sings, “I used to be young and bold but now I’m getting old...I am a champion of regression.” Don’t settle for champion of regression; be a champion of mission. Like my friend says, Lord, put me in a place that requires faith, prayer. Why? To get more, more of God, more of his glory dwelling among us to create a city where all people flourish.

## Presence

Being strong and courageous can sound cliché, like do-it-yourself bravery or try harder, but it’s not. Because this command is paired with a shockingly good promise. God will be with you. The one, true God. YHWH who rules the world, guiding it to total renewal. Who is working every minute of every day to sum up all things in Christ for comprehensive transformation: social, physical, cultural, spiritual. So, yes, it is try harder, attempt more, be courageous, but not on your own. *I will be with you.* God pairs this command with a shockingly good promise I will be with you. In what way? He will be with you everywhere and all the time. *Everywhere: Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go*” (Jos 1:9). Everywhere? Yes, and now that he has put his name on us, and his Spirit in us, he is with us wherever we go. What would change if you took this promise seriously, how might it change how you go to work, talk with friends, live in community, engage the city? He has promised to be with you, everywhere, and *all the time*. Even when we fear. He anticipates the natural fear and anxiety we have when we step out in obedient faith. When I contemplate what opening my life more to God’s call means, it scares me a little. What will he ask? What comforts will I leave behind? How much will it cost? Not more than it cost him to secure this promise: (Jos 1:9). Don’t fear. Why? Consider who goes with you. Romans 8:31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” All the time, we don’t fear because God never looks away, steps aside to tend to other things. He’s always got his eye on you, he is with you all the time: “Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you” (1:5; Heb 13:5) Not leave, never forsake. With you All. The. Time. Not once does he step away. This should embolden us to attempt great things because we have a great God with us all the time, everywhere we go. Let’s exercise a *more* obedient faith because of a shockingly good God of promise!