

## “BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS”

Joshua 1:1-18

Key Verse: 1:6

*“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.”*

The book of Joshua is a very important book for us in two ways. First, Joshua is a shadow of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus is our Savior. The book of Joshua is primarily the book of God’s salvation as much as the book of God’s judgment. Second, Joshua is a pioneer. Joshua led the Israelites to possess the promised land (Heb 4:8-9). Jesus is the pioneer of our salvation. Through the book of Joshua we can learn a pioneering and fighting spirit. Through this passage, let us think about the secret of spiritual leadership that God blesses.

### I. MOSES AND JOSHUA (1-2)

Look at verses 1-2. *After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide: “Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them--to the Israelites.”* What was the situation of the people of Israel as this book opens? After the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites had wandered for 40 years through the desert, because they did not obey God. God wanted to train them to become a people who could be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Moses was a great leader who put up with the people who were steeped in slave mentality. However, God did not allow him to lead his people to the promised land. He saw the promised land only from a distance. The older generation had died during these years, except for Joshua and Caleb. The new generation had to learn to live by faith.

Now they were camped just east of the Jordan River. Finally they were about to enter the promised land. But they knew that the promised land was not a vacant land that was waiting for them to come and occupy. The Canaanites were there. The giant people would be their formidable enemies. At this important point, God appointed Joshua to be their spiritual leader. Then who was Joshua? He was a man of faith. Joshua distinguished himself as a man of faith and courage when he (and Caleb) gave a minority report after spying out the promised land. Returning from their reconnaissance mission for the land of Canaan, the ten of the 12 members reported, “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large... We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” But Caleb and Joshua gave an entirely different report. They said, “If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them” (Nu 13:30-14:9).

Another thing about Joshua was that he had a learning mind. Verse 1 describes him as “Moses’ aide.” Joshua’s leadership qualities did not come naturally. For 40 years, Joshua humbly learned from Moses as his assistant. And Moses helped him to grow in God’s wisdom and spirit. Before his death, Moses prepared him to be a spiritual leader. Deuteronomy 34:9 says: “Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses.”

We can say that Joshua had a spiritual relationship with Moses. In fact, spiritual relationship is very important for spiritual leadership. Verse 1 says that Moses was a servant of the Lord and Joshua was Moses’ aide. It indicates their personal relationship with God and with each other. Moses did mighty miracles. But he is not remembered by the many miracles he performed, but instead, his relationship with God. Similarly, Joshua had faith in God, but his relationship with Moses was very important for his spiritual leadership. Joshua learned from Moses how to pray, how to lead others, and how to humble himself before God. As Moses’ assistant, Joshua started out doing very simple tasks, such as running errands. But gradually he grew as his trusted co-worker and made contributions in helping him fulfill his leadership responsibilities. Joshua stood by Moses in many historical moments—the exodus from Egypt, the victory over the Amalekites, at Mount of Sinai, spying out the Promised Land, and throughout 40 years of the wilderness journey.

We learn here that we can grow to be spiritual leaders through our personal relationship with God and with God’s servants. No matter how talented a person may be, he who does not know how to develop spiritual relationships with God and God’s servants cannot be a spiritual leader. On the other hand, there is power in a beautiful spiritual relationship. Spiritual relationship is heart-to-heart relationship. Like Moses we must grow to know God and obey his commands. Like Joshua, we must learn to have a spiritual relationship with God’s servants. May our ministry be focused on building spiritual relationships!

## II. “I WILL BE WITH YOU” (2-5)

Look at verse 2: “*Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.*” After Moses’ death God instructed Joshua about his immediate mission. It was to get ready to cross the Jordan River to enter the promised land.

Look at verses 3-4: “*I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west.*” God promised Joshua that all the land—every place where Joshua set his feet—would be given to his people.

Look at verse 5: “*No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.*”

God promised to give him spiritual authority that nobody would dare to challenge. Joshua saw how Moses had grown in spiritual leadership. Initially, Moses had a very humble beginning. He was not sure whether or not he could even speak a word before Pharaoh. Gradually, God exalted him in the sight of the Israelites. Likewise, God would raise up Joshua and clothe him with spiritual authority.

God's servants need spiritual authority to do God's work. Without spiritual authority no one can really engage in life-giving work of God. For example, consider Abraham's nephew Lot in the book of Genesis. He was rich but miserable. Why? He was a religious man without spiritual authority. When he warned his sons-in-law about the impending judgment of God, they thought that he was joking (Ge 19:14). With spiritual authority the disciples of Jesus could drive out demons and heal the sick (Lk 10:17). Without spiritual authority they were just like failed magicians (Mk 9:19). Without spiritual authority Peter denied Jesus three times before a servant girl. With the spiritual authority Peter said, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Ac 4:19-20).

Such spiritual authority is not just for great servants. To engage in effective 1:1 ministry we must be clothed with spiritual authority. Otherwise, we teach the Bible but cannot lead young people to repent their sins and commit their lives to Christ. Then how can we be clothed with spiritual authority? Look at verse 5b: "*As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" We can have spiritual authority by holding the promise that God is with us. This is God's promise that we must remember: "I will be with you; I will never leave your nor forsake you." Jesus gave us the same promise to be with us along with his world mission command. Matthew 28:18-20 says: *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

From a human point of view, most of our missionaries and shepherds are neither powerful nor influential in this world. But in God's eyes we are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We are royal priests because we have the mission from God to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the peoples of the world (1Pe 2:9). In the book of Daniel many powerful people of the world—like Nebuchadnezzar—are compared to beasts. The Bible teaches, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall." (1Pe 1:24). That's the way our God sees the world. Therefore, we must also look at the world with spiritual eyes. We must realize that we have the good news of great joy to share with all peoples of the world.

One day Peter was going to the temple to pray. He was the head of a church that had more than 3,000 members. But he did not carry any money. When a beggar asked him for money, he said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk"(Acts 3:6). How could he do that? Peter really believed that Jesus was with him. He prayed each and every day to be with God. He

spent time with God and God gave him spiritual authority. Let's pray that all of us may teach the Bible with the spiritual authority that Jesus gives to us.

### III. "BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS" (6-9)

Look at verse 6. *"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them."* God commanded Joshua, "Be strong and courageous." Why did God tell him to be strong and courageous? It was because his mission to lead his people to the promised land was not going to be easy. God gave them the promised land, but they had to fight to claim it as their inheritance. This sounds paradoxical. In fact, there are many things that sound paradoxical in the Christian life. Jesus told us that if we want to save our life, we must lose it first. If one wants to be a great leader, he must be a servant of all. If we want to be the first, we must be the last. God told Joshua that he was about to give the land to his people, but he told him to be strong and courageous in order to claim the promised land. This is true about many of God's blessings. He does not spoon-feed us. Think about our ultimate promise land. God promised to give us eternal life in the kingdom of God. But we must be faithful pilgrims to get there. God wants us to become strong believers along the way by overcoming many challenges by faith.

Then how can we be strong and courageous? Look at verses 7-8: *"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."* God told Joshua to be careful to obey all the law Moses gave to his people. God told him not to depart from God's law either to the right or to the left.

Now this sounds impractical, since Joshua was a military leader. Joshua was not appointed as a missionary. He had to secure military victory. However, the secret of his military success was in following the word of God. It was because God himself would fight for them. As the commander-in-chief, Joshua had many things to do, but the most important thing he had to do each and every day was a spiritual one. Joshua was to mediate the word of God with great diligence. God said, "Then you will be prosperous and successful." Here, God promised him not just one-dimensional success in his military campaign but also comprehensive success in all other matters. Joshua followed God's words. He studied the Bible and obeyed God faithfully. Then Joshua was prosperous and successful. Joshua was a godly man. He had respect and honor from his people. He fulfilled God's command to conquer the Canaan land successfully. Real success comes from God. God helped Joshua to secure godly success—military victory, personal integrity, and spiritual legacy.

God wants to give us success in whatever we do. Is it possible for each of us to attain success that God blesses and acknowledges? How can we have real success in what we do? It is through diligent Bible study and prayer. This is the secret of success that God blesses.

#### IV. “WHEREVER YOU SEND US WE WILL GO” (10-18)

Joshua could have complained about God’s command for its impracticality. He was facing a daunting task. The cities of his enemies were well fortified. Their soldiers were well trained. They had advanced weaponry. The army of Israel was a joke compared to the Canaanite armies. The Israelites were not well trained. They had no equipment. The only thing they were good at was complaining. They complained just about everything. But God did not help Joshua with any of these deficiencies. God told him only to be strong and courageous. And Joshua showed his faith by accepting the word of God in his heart. He obeyed the word of God.

Joshua’s first critical test of leadership was to cross the Jordan and prepare for many battles ahead. Joshua ordered the officers of the people to go through the camp and instruct people to get ready to cross the Jordan. Joshua learned to co-work with other leaders. However, there was one issue he had to resolve in order to have a unity among them. The Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh had arranged with Moses to possess the land east of the Jordan--the land they had already secured. These tribes had no incentive to risk their lives to cross the Jordan River and fight against the strong Canaanites, because they already had their land. They could just settle there and not care about the other tribes. But such selfish action would be detrimental to their unity. So Joshua reminded them of their promise to engage in battles along with the other tribes until the conquest of Canaan was completed. The conquest of Canaan required their combined efforts.

At Joshua’s challenge, the two and a half tribes promised their full obedience to him. They prayed for God’s presence and blessings upon Joshua. They were willing to be front-line soldiers. They urged Joshua only to be strong and courageous. When Joshua obeyed God, all his people were willing to follow him absolutely. The two and a half tribes accepted Joshua’s leadership. They were willing to obey and follow his instructions absolutely. Why? They first submitted themselves to God’s leadership. They also were willing to fight not only for their families but also for the people of God as a whole.

A young woman was filling out her college application and her heart sank when she came to the question, “Are you a leader?” on the form. She knew it was going to hurt her chances of getting in, but honestly answered “no.” To her surprise, she was admitted to the college. The admissions director wrote, “according to the applications, we will have 1,452 new leaders next year. We are accepting you because we feel it is important that these leaders have at least one follower.”

Victory is possible not by one person’s excellent leadership alone. It is through the combined efforts of many. God is most pleased when we do not settle down but keep growing. May God help all of us grow in four aspects of spiritual leadership –spiritual relationship, spiritual authority, spiritual discipline, and pioneering spirit to the end! May God help us to experience much success in leading young students to Christ and helping them to become disciples of Jesus!