

God's Faithfulness in Uncertain Times

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Date: 06 September 2020

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn to our Bible reading this morning, and we are looking at the very start of the book of Joshua. We were at the very end of it a few weeks ago.

Willie was considering these big questions that God poses to us, and we're in the very end of Joshua. So I thought it might be good to go back to the very beginning. We'll look at Joshua chapter 1 this morning, and next week we'll be in Joshua chapter 2.

But please do turn there to the very beginning, Joshua chapter 1, and we'll read this chapter together. Joshua 1, verse 1.

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.

[1 : 1 3] 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.

[2 : 3 6] And Joshua commanded the officers of the people, pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan to go into it, to take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, remember the word that Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded you, saying, the Lord your God is providing you a place of rest, and will give you this land.

Your wives and your loved ones, your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brothers, and shall help them, until the Lord gives rest to your brothers, as he has given to you.

And they also take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession, and shall possess it, the land that Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you beyond the Jordan towards the sunrise.

And they answered Joshua, all that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go, just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you.

[4 : 01] Only may the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him shall be put to death.

Only be strong and courageous. Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may he bless it to us this morning.

Well, please do turn up Joshua chapter one, which we will be thinking about now.

So do have that open in front of you. That would be a great help. Now, the world has radically changed, hasn't it?

It almost doesn't need saying. The world we once knew, we may never know again. The world pre-COVID. It's hard to imagine being back in those days, isn't it?

[5 : 09] And even if we do get back to those days, it may not be for a very long time. Uncertainty abounds for everyone, and it's deeply unsettling.

What do God's people, his church, need to know when major change is underway, when the future seems so uncertain, when things which for so long we took for granted are stripped away, what are we to do?

What hope can we cling to ourselves, and what hope can we share with those we work alongside? And the answer, as we'll see, is a sure and certain hope, because we belong to a God who is faithful from generation to generation.

Great is his faithfulness. And you see, there is nothing new under the sun. These days we're living in. They are not unprecedented.

All through history, there have been moments of huge, profound change, when things change forever. And this first chapter of Joshua has so much to say to us as God's people living through these coronavirus days.

[6 : 35] You see, God's people, at the start of Joshua, they're not living in a post-COVID world, they're living in a post-Moses one. Moses is no longer.

And it's hard to emphasize just how significant it would have been for that people to no longer be living under his leadership, especially at this juncture in their history.

This is a pivotal moment, a huge, critical moment in the life of God's people. Great battles lay ahead. A new leader in place.

A land to claim. After their release from slavery in Egypt, after 40 long years wandering in the desert, they at last arrive on the edge of the promised land.

In many ways, I'm sure these people were absolutely elated, excited. All these years wandering around in the deserts, and at last, there they are.

[7 : 38] They can see across the Jordan the land that's been promised to them. But then the unthinkable happens. Listen to the last paragraphs of Deuteronomy.

Just flick back one page in your Bible, and you'll see the very last chapter, verse 34, chapter 34 of Deuteronomy. I'll just read a few verses from here.

It says this, Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, which is opposite Jericho. That was the first city in the promised land they were to take.

And the Lord showed him all the land. And the Lord said to him, This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to your offspring.

I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there. So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.

[8 : 40] And he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab. Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, his vigor unabated. And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for 30 days.

There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. None like him. For all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, to all his servants, and to all his land.

And for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel. You see, there was no one like Moses.

There would be no one like him until, of course, the Lord Jesus, the greater Moses. Moses was a great man.

He was a towering figure for the people of Israel. And now he was dead. What do you need when the great Moses dies?

[9 : 47] When there was a land to inherit with a great river between you and it and great fortified cities to conquer? What do God's people need today?

When the earth is shaking beneath them, everything that once seemed so stable and certain has been stripped away. Well, God's people then and today need Joshua chapter 1.

And here's the first lesson the writer has for us. Looking at verses 1 to 4, we see that everything has changed, but God's promises haven't. The book of Joshua picks up right from where Deuteronomy ends, doesn't it?

Look at verse 1. Look at verse 1. After the death of Moses. God's people are living in the post-Moses world. And that reality must have brought with it great uncertainty and a certain amount of fear.

You see, this generation of Israelites, they knew only of Moses' leadership. They were born under his leadership. He had led them through the wilderness wanderings.

[10 : 56] The great goal of the promised land was in sight. Literally, it was there. They could see it. And at the crucial moment, he's gone. The great towering figure in the life of God's people.

The one who was at the very center of it all. The one who had, on a human level, won them freedom from bitter slavery in Egypt. The one who had brought them to the brink of the promised land. He was dead.

Surely, this was a moment of national crisis for Israel. And his death, it looms large, doesn't it?

It casts its shadow over Joshua 1. Just notice how many times Moses is referred to in this chapter. Look at the first verse alone. After the death of Moses.

The servant of the Lord. The Lord said to Joshua, the son of none, Moses' assistant. Verse 2. Moses, my servant, is dead. Eleven times in this first chapter alone, you get Moses referred to.

[12 : 01] At a human level, he was a colossus of a man. More than any other figure in the Old Testament. It was he who shaped and led God's people.

A huge thing for him to have died. Everything's changed. Everything, that is. Apart from the promises of God.

That is the resounding note in this first chapter. Yes, Moses died. And we need to feel the weight of that. That's a huge moment.

But God's promises are bigger. They are bigger even than Moses. And the big message of the first section of Joshua, which runs almost to the very end of the book. The message is all about God's faithfulness.

Faithfulness. Notice the other repeated word and idea in chapter 1. Moses is all over it, but there's another thing. God says that he is giving the people the land.

[13 : 03] He is giving them the land. Yes, Moses is dead, but the promise of the land still holds. Notice there in verse 2. Towards the end he says, I am giving them, the people of Israel, the land.

Verse 3. Given to you. Verse 6. I swore to their fathers to give them. Again in verse 11. Giving.

Verse 13. Giving. Verse 15. Twice. Giving. I'm giving. I'm giving. I have given. I'm giving you the land. The Lord is promising to give them this land that he promised all those years ago.

At the very end of this first major section of Joshua, which finishes in chapter 21, listen to what the writer says. He says, thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers.

And they took possession of it. And they settled there. And the Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he swore to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them.

[14 : 15] For the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. And not one word of all the good promises the Lord God had made to the house of Israel had failed.

All came to pass. That's the end of the first main section of Joshua. All that God promised.

Every single promise. Came to be. The land that God promised to give. He has given. God is faithful.

This is so much bigger than one man. This is bigger than Moses. These are promises that stretch back through the generations. And central to all that God says to Joshua here is the age-old promise of the land.

It is the land, verse 3, that was promised to Moses. In fact, that promise precedes Moses, doesn't it? The promise has its roots in the very foundation of the Bible.

[15 : 18] Genesis chapter 2. We read of God placing his people, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. A place where they were to enjoy God's blessing.

Where they would enjoy perfect rest. But as we know, by the end of chapter 3 of Genesis, they've been excluded from the Garden. Excluded from the land. But then Genesis 12.

God made a glorious promise to Abraham. That he would again bring his people into a land that would be theirs. A place where they had no rest. Where they could live.

A place that they could call their own. A new Eden. And all through Genesis, you read of this promise of land. Genesis 12, 13, and 15, and 17, and 24.

Those promises of a people and a place were made to Abraham. And by this point, in the history of God's people, at the start of Joshua, the promise of a people is largely, well, it's on the way to being fulfilled.

[16 : 26] There are millions of Israelites there ready to take in the land. But the land that was promised has not yet been taken. That promise has not been fulfilled yet, has it?

Hundreds of years have passed. But they've not yet taken the land. But God's promise to Abraham, it is a sure thing.

What God has said, he will do. And Joshua is the book where we see the fulfillment, or the beginning of the fulfillment of that promise.

Joshua is the book where the people do at last enter the land. God kept his promises. Joshua evidences that the promises of God are fulfilled.

And it's this particular promise of land, of real estate, that we see being fulfilled here. And what we're being shown in these opening verse of Joshua, we're being shown that God's promises are certain, despite the passing of great leaders.

[17 : 37] Great leaders may come and go, but God's promises are utterly unaffected. They are unaffected when God's great leaders go. The one who had led them out of Egypt.

The great Moses, the one who met with God on the mountain, who carried those tablets of stone with the very words of God. The one to whom God would speak directly. Well, Moses was now gone.

The people would have felt great sorrow, great grief. And yet, God's promise was not contingent on any one human leader.

Moses dies, but his promise lives on. God's kingdom does not depend on personality, but rather on his promises.

God does not keep his special promises for big men, but gives them to all his children. He gives them to you. He doesn't just give them to the Billy Grahams.

[18 : 46] He gives them to you. And that should encourage us, shouldn't it? Perhaps it should challenge us. God's promises live on despite a great leader, a leader to whom you look up to and respect, who on a human level perhaps brought you into the kingdom.

God's promises live on despite their passing. And that can be such a hard thing, can't it? When somebody you've looked up to all your life, suddenly they're gone for whatever reason.

Perhaps they move to a new ministry. Perhaps they retire. Perhaps they've died. But God's promises are certain, despite the passing of a great leader.

And it's a warning, isn't it? Not to make an idol out of God's servants. It's only his promises that abide. And we know they abide because of the one who fulfills all those promises.

In Jesus, the greater Moses, the greater Joshua, all those promises find their fulfillment. The one who defeated death.

[19 : 59] The one who reigns now at the right hand of God the Father. The one who will return to usher in the new creation, the new Eden, the new Jerusalem. The one who will bring the land of rest that you and I yearn for.

He will bring that land for all eternity. He will do it. That is a sure and certain thing because of the resurrection of Jesus.

And that is a great comfort to you and to me in these uncertain times that we find ourselves in. So much seems uncertain, so much to cause us fear and anxiety, but God's promises, they hold firm.

There is a land to come, a real land which will be ours for all eternity. No pandemic can take that from us. No death of a great leader can take that from us.

Great leaders in the church may well be cut off by death or fail in the middle of their ministry, but the faithfulness of God, that never fails.

[21 : 18] His great power is not tied down to men and women, great and gifted though they may be. He will have others waiting in the wings to keep the work going through whom he may do even greater things.

Everything may have changed, but God's promises haven't. That's the first key lesson that God's people then need to know and grasp.

And that's what we need to know and grasp as well. God's promises, they never fail. That's the first thing. Second, God's people need to know that key leaders may have gone, but God's presence endures, verses 5 to 11.

His promises never fail, but secondly, his presence endures. And the key sentence is there in the second half of verse 5. Look down with me there at the end of the verse 5.

Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. And again, look down to verse 9.

[22 : 27] The second half of verse 9 says, Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Can you imagine the impact of hearing these promises for Joshua?

He perhaps knew these things in theory, but to have these words uttered by God himself, to hear him say, Just as I was with Moses, I will be with you.

Surely that would have put steel in his spine for all that he knew lay ahead. Imagine you're Joshua. Moses is gone. You've got the promised land to take the people into. That is a huge weight on your shoulders.

But the Lord says to him, I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Surely that would have put steel in his spine for all that lay ahead. It is that reality that enables Joshua to do all that he does.

It is because God has first promised his presence that he can then tell Joshua to be strong and courageous. Verses 6, 7 and 9. It wasn't that Joshua was being asked to kind of stir himself up, to grit his teeth, to run into battle.

[23 : 50] No, he is to be strong. He is to be courageous only because God is with him. And just as God promises to be with Joshua, he is promising to be with all of Joshua's people.

Joshua was now the leader of God's people just as Moses was. And just like Moses, he was the representative to God of the whole people. And he was the representative of God to the people.

And so when God promises to be with Joshua, he is promising to be also with the people that Joshua represents. To the degree that he was with Joshua, he was with all those people.

And these words would have brought real comfort to those people, don't you think? To not only have God's promises, but to have his presence.

He was going to be with them. A monumental task lies ahead. An inheritance to claim. Battles to be fought. But without Moses.

[24 : 59] What would have seemed like an already difficult task would have seemed doubly difficult now. A task their parents' generation turned away from even when Moses was with them.

Remember that? They refused to go into the land 40 years earlier. Would they now go where their parents refused to go? Well, it was to these people.

But the God of Moses promised to be with them, to never leave or forsake them. The God who parted the Red Sea, who enabled the first generation to flee from Egypt.

The God who did that promised to be with them. This is no small God. This is the God of all creation. This is the God who with the word brought everything, the whole universe, into existence.

That God was promising to be with them. The God who determines every breath of every human being that's ever lived. That God was promising to be with them.

[26 : 01] Moses has died, yes, but God is still the same. Yesterday, today, and forever. And he's present with Joshua and he's present with all his people to help them and to deliver them.

That's all very well, you might think. That's great for Joshua. Great for those people there and that's really super. But what about us?

What about me? Listen to these words from Hebrews chapter 13. The writer says, keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have.

For he has said, I will never leave nor forsake you. So we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear.

What can man do to me? Do you see what the writer of Hebrews is saying there? He is taking the promises that God gave to Joshua and he's applying them to the New Testament believer.

[27 : 10] He says that we may confidently say, not Moses only, not Joshua only, but we also may boldly say the Lord is my helper.

I will not fear. What can man do to me? The writer of the Hebrews is clear, isn't he? We can take this word to Joshua in verse 5.

We can apply it to our situation as New Testament believers. we can put ourselves in Joshua's place. We're not the man that he was.

We're small by comparison. Yet God says this to us. As I was with Joshua, the Joshua who brought the walls of Jericho tumbling down, so I will be with you.

that is the word of God to you, New Testament Christian this morning. And there is nothing more essential for the people of God than to hear their God repeating to them amidst all the changing circumstances in life, I will be with you.

[28 : 19] I will not forsake you. Now I don't know and neither do you what these next weeks will bring.

Further lockdowns seems inevitable. Economic uncertainty, unforeseen consequences in terms of all the steps taken so far in terms of mental health, physical health, economic health and most importantly of all, eternal spiritual health.

But no matter what comes, the Lord says to you, I will be with you. I will not forsake you.

Personal loss and tragedy may come. But no matter what comes, the Lord says to you, I will be with you. I will not forsake you both now and for all eternity.

Problems with your job may arise. The job you've had for so long may suddenly be taken away. But no matter what comes, the Lord says to you, I will be with you.

[29 : 36] I will not leave you or forsake you, both now and for all eternity. Relational issues may bring you great sadness and hurt and harm and difficulty, but no matter what comes, the Lord says to you, I will be with you.

I will not forsake you, both now and for all eternity. Isn't that a great reassuring word for us this morning?

To know that God is with you, he's with me. But notice also what God's presence is tied up with.

It is inseparable from a close and careful obedience to his word. That is how God's people then and in every age really know God's presence.

Look at verses 7 and 8. He has just made this wonderful promise to Joshua that he will be with him, he will never leave or forsake him. But look on to what he says next.

[30 : 42] He says only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do all according to 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.

A constant, careful absorbing of the word of God leads to obedience to it. A determination to be with God's people and around his word whenever we can is going to aid obedience to God's word and an enjoyment of his presence.

You cannot enjoy the presence of God if you ignore his word, if you ignore what he says. So the last thing that you should do when you are anxious and fearful about what lies ahead is to stay away from God's people, the very place where he promises to be present as we gather together around his word.

It is tied inextricably together here, isn't it, Joshua chapter one. I will be with you. Read my word. Obey my commands. I'll be with you.

[32 : 11] You can't tear those things apart. So yes, I will be with you, but do not neglect my word.

Do not neglect to obey all that is said. So key leaders may have gone, but God's presence endures with his people.

And that is a great and wonderful promise. But don't miss the third thing in this chapter from verse 10 to the end. Yes, God's promise is with them, their presence is with them.

But third, God's people remain united. They remain united. God has reiterated those great promises, those ancient promises.

I'm going to give you the land. I'm going to be with you. And that is met with unity from the people of God. That's what we see in this last paragraph.

[33 : 11] Joshua has heard the promises of God. He is determined to go now and take the promised land. So he rallies the troops. Verses 10 and 11, he says, boys, it's time to go. But notice a slightly surprising detail there in the text, verses 12 to 14.

I wonder if when I was reading this earlier, I was wondering what on earth is it all about? Why are we talking about Reubenites and Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh? What's that all about? Well, very particular instructions are given to these tribes, to the Reubenites, to the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh.

But why? Well, you can read the background in Numbers chapter 32, do. But these two and a half tribes, they asked Moses if they could take the land east of the Jordan as their inheritance.

So God's people were approaching the promised land from the east. They were coming in this way, with the Jordan line between them and the promised land. And when they came around and saw the land east of the Jordan, they thought, this looks amazing, let's take this land.

And they spoke to Moses and they said, can we take the land now on the east of the Jordan? And a deal was struck with Moses that those tribes could take that land east of the Jordan if they could take it if they assisted the rest of the tribes in gaining their inheritance west of the Jordan.

[34 : 43] So they could live over here where they have to go and help the others take this land on this side of the Jordan. they would have to send men into the battle to help with the conquest and only if they did that could they take their land on the east.

And here in Joshua 1, those promises that those tribes made to Moses are being cashed in. You made those promises, well now it's time. Now this was a moment that could have sparked the beginning of the end.

Those tribes east of the Jordan they would have been tempted I'm sure to seek the quiet life, to settle down, to build nice homes and say good luck to the rest of you going over the Jordan into the west, all the best.

They could have done that. But instead they align themselves with all the people of God. They willingly send their men of fighting age to join the conquest. They align themselves together as a unity with the rest of God's people.

And that was so key for all that was to follow in the rest of Joshua. These two and a half tribes were central to the conquest on the west. And that is so key for God's people today.

[36 : 03] When hardship and uncertainty and difficulties come, we can be assured of God's promises and his presence, but we must together stand firm, united, together.

Not going off and suiting ourselves, no, we are to care more about the overall health of the whole church body rather than putting ourselves first.

We are to care about the whole church more than our own selves. God hasn't given us his promises and his presence for us to be selfish, but rather to serve.

And that is what God's people do here. Those two and a half tribes, they serve. They're not selfish, they serve. they commit to one another to go into that conquest, to send their best men, and it helps the other tribes too.

Now, I don't know about you, but seeing others in the church serving sacrificially, faithfully, that helps me to do the same, to seek to faithfully serve.

[37 : 21] seeing others serving helps me know in very real ways that yes, God is with us. He's with me, and he is keeping his promises.

He will never leave or forsake us. So in these very strange and troubling times, we must more than ever draw together to unite around our great goal to seek and save the lost of our city in every nation that we might save some, that we may together grow to maturity for all eternity.

I need everybody on board for that task. There can be nobody sitting on the east of the Jordan, putting their feet up and enjoying their inheritance. No, all together, striving together for our great task.

God's presence, yes, his promises, yes, but God's people remain united for the task they've been called to.

And that's the encouragement of Joshua chapter one. Yes, hard times may come. Uncertainty may be our way of life for the time being, but God's promises and his presence, they are unaffected by all of that.

[38 : 44] And he says to you, each one of you, Tron Church, each one of you watching online, each one of you at other venues, he says to you, he says to each one of you, I will not leave you.

I will never forsake you. And isn't that a wonderful thing? Let me pray. Our Father God in heaven, the God of Moses, the God of Joshua, how thankful we are that you are our God and you are the same then and today.

And that your promises still hold firm. They are more sure even today. because we look back on the great moment of history when the Lord Jesus came and died and rose again.

We can know with even greater certainty that your promises are sure and certain. And so help us to know that you are with us.

Help us to know, each one of us, that you will never leave or forsake us. So encourage our hearts as we go from this place, before we ask it, in Jesus' name.

[40 : 15] Amen. Amen. Amen.