

July 21, 2019

Joshua 1:9

Thirty years ago I graduated from our seminary with that verse as our class verse. As we were picking that verse, some didn't like the choice - "**Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged.**" They thought it made them sound like wimps. When God gave this verse to Joshua, I don't think there's anything in the Bible to suggest that Joshua was a wimp.

For forty years, Joshua had been at the lead, serving at Moses' side. You might remember - earlier this summer we talked about this - forty years before this, just weeks after God delivered his people from Egypt, when the Amalekites attacked, Joshua was set up for the fight as commander of Israel's army. A year later, when Israel was at the border of the Promised Land, Joshua was one of the twelve spies sent to check out the land of Canaan. When ten of those spies came back with a quitters' report - "we can't do it; the people are too powerful" - Joshua was one of the two who came back with a God-trusting report - "yes, the people are powerful, but God is greater; yes, the people are powerful, but we have God and his promise!" Sad to say, God's people wouldn't listen. God's promise wasn't good enough for his people, so God instead announced his judgment on his ungrateful people - forty years of wandering in the wilderness until all those twenty years old and older at the Exodus (they had seen what God can do; they should have known better than to doubt him) all those twenty years old and older would die in the desert. All except Joshua and Caleb - they had believed God's promise and so they would get to see God keep his promise. So for forty years, Joshua was at Moses' side, God training him for this day.

Now it was time. Moses was dead. The Moses who had led God's people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, through the Sinai wilderness for 40 years ... the Moses who had talked with God, whose face glowed with the glory of God ... the Moses the people had looked to for help and argued against for forty years ... now when it was crunch time, time to enter the Promised Land, time to go to war and face the enemy armies ... that Moses was dead. Now it was God's time for Joshua to lead. Joshua would be the one to lead God's people across the Jordan ... to lead them against the enemy armies ... to lead them into the Promised Land. The people would be looking to Joshua to lead them in the fight; they would be looking to Joshua to make sure life was

made right.

So when God set Joshua up as leader, he didn't just say: "Good luck." God didn't tell Joshua what a good leader he had become, how he had fought the enemy and won, how he had passed some leadership test, how he had won his people's confidence, and if not their confidence, that he had won God's confidence. No, God didn't talk about any of that. Instead, God said: "**Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.**"

When the enemies out there are hard against you ... when troublemakers inside your camp are making trouble for you ... when your people won't follow ... when your days are hard and long ... when what's ahead of you seems impossible ... when your people are looking to you and you don't want to fail them ... when God's answers and God's ways don't seem to make any sense ... when God's answers and God's ways don't seem to work ... "**Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged.**"

Why? Because you're smarter and stronger? Because you're such a good leader, such a good parent, because you're so good at what you do? No. Here's why - "**for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.**"

Do you ever feel like your world has turned against you? Or that what's ahead for you is impossible? "**Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.**" He delivered his people out from under Pharaoh's thumb; he delivered his people through the Red Sea. And "**he will be with you wherever you go.**"

Do you ever feel let down, frustrated, betrayed? You work hard to make things right, but someone doesn't listen, someone doesn't follow through, and things go wrong in an ugly way? Or someone promises you ... someone promises you, and you believe them, only to have your hope and your heart crushed? "**Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.**" No matter how many times people failed Joshua and Moses before him, God kept his promises, and no matter how many times people fail you, God will

keep his promises to you. No matter how many times people fail you, you get to know things will still work together for your good. Why? **“The LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”**

Do you ever feel like the failure? A failure as a leader, a failure as a parent, a failure as a child of God? You want to be strong with Jesus; you want to say the right thing and do the right thing, but under pressure you crumble. You want to be strong with Jesus; you want to say the right thing, the right way, but you get yourself so worked up, you come across as a grouch and a bully-boss with little Jesus in you. You want to get it right for God; you want to get it right for the people in your life; but time and again, you seem to get it wrong.

I know that time and again I get it wrong here, at home, out in the world. And then it can be so easy to make excuses or blame someone else, so easy to get stuck beating ourselves up, so easy to quit. Driving home earlier this week, the Spirit reminded me: “our lesson doesn’t just say, ‘do not be terrified,’ but also ‘do not be discouraged. Not just discouraged by what’s out there, but do not be discouraged by what’s in here.”

Why? God didn’t just give us a Joshua. He didn’t just give us a pep-talk - **“be strong and courageous.”** God gave us a Jesus, a Savior. Jesus didn’t give up under pressure, and he didn’t get himself so worked up, so strong and courageous that he ran over his people like a bully. Jesus led and he served with the strength of God and with the love of God. But Jesus didn’t just get it right. Jesus took our wrong, our wrong as leaders, our wrong as parents, our wrong as the children of God. He took our wrong as his own and buried it at the cross. Now, with his Spirit, he says to you: “You’re forgiven. Forgiven and right with God. Forgiven to lead with God. Forgiven to serve with God.” With God, we don’t need to live stuck and afraid. With God, we don’t need to live down and out because things aren’t going our way. With God, we don’t need to get down on ourselves or down on each other. With God, we get to step up and lead with the heart of Jesus. With God, we get to step up and serve with the heart of Jesus. Why? Listen to what he says: **“Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”**