



A few years ago there was an ad on TV showing a woman sitting in a car. She's minding her own business when suddenly this man comes out of nowhere, rips the door open, grabs her, and roughly pulls her out of the car. It looks like he's attacking her and we look on in horror. Then the camera pulls back and we see her car is actually on fire, but the woman didn't know it. The man wasn't assaulting her; he was rescuing her. The ad finishes by saying, "You need the bigger picture. Channel 5 News gives you the bigger picture."

That ad makes a good point. We need to have the bigger picture. This was true of the people of Israel in the book of Joshua. As they looked in the direction of the Jordan River, knowing they'd have to cross it and then face cities and people who were big and powerful, they were overwhelmed and afraid. They even wondered at times if God had brought them out there just to watch them die. They needed to see the bigger picture.

Taking Possession of the Land

We've been moving through the big story of the Bible for several weeks. The Israelites are now on the verge of finally entering the Promised Land. The previous generation had been rescued from Egypt under Moses. They'd seen miraculous events and signs in the wilderness, but right when they're about to enter the land, fear took over. They failed to see the bigger picture. They stopped trusting God and believing his promises. Instead of taking possession of the land, they wandered in the wilderness and eventually died there.

This is a warning to us. We need to see the bigger picture, too. You see, this whole story is meant to be a picture of our life in Christ. The Exodus is a picture of salvation from slavery to sin, death and the devil. When you placed your faith in Christ you were delivered from all of that. You're no longer in Egypt, but there's still the matter of entering and possessing the land. That's what God called Israel to do, and that's a picture of our life in Christ. Just as Joshua led the people of Israel into the Land, just as they had to fight to find rest from their enemies, so we're called to move forward and take possession of all that God has for us in Christ. But how many of us, because of our fear and our unwillingness to trust God, have wasted five, ten or even forty years of our own lives? Instead of moving forward in faith, we shrunk back in fear. And so, our Christian experience has been a wandering through the bleak and barren wilderness. To experience the fruit of the Promised Land, we need to be willing to fight the battles

against strongholds like addiction, unresolved anger, self-pity, pride, envy, lust, procrastination and materialism.

Fourteen hundred years later the writer of Hebrews wrote, "*For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God*" (Heb. 4:8-9). He's talking about us, entering into the land. The end of the conquest is rest from all our enemies, but we're not there yet. That's why he says, "*Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience*" (Heb. 4:11).

Up to this point, the Israelites were led by Moses and his second in command, a young man named Joshua. Remember when the twelve spies were sent into the land, only two came back and said, "We can do it. God is faithful. Let's go in and take the land!" One of those men was Joshua; the other was Caleb. But at the end of Deuteronomy, Moses died and Joshua is the one who'd lead them into the Promised Land. Can he do it? The reasons for the fears they had when they checked out the land 40 years earlier are still there. There's still a river to cross; still people who are big and scary and cities with fortified walls. And now they face all that without Moses. It says of Moses in Deut. 34:10, "*Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt...*" How'd you like to replace that guy? How could Joshua possibly do what Moses failed to do? So God comes to him and gives him what he needed and what we need to go in and possess the land: the bigger picture.

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. 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 Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand 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. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

"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. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; 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. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:1–9).

There are three things here that comprise the bigger picture as we seek to take possession.

The Land is Given by God as a Gift and Not Taken by Our Own Efforts

First, the land is given as a gift from God. Notice how often the word "give" is used—three times in these verses and then four more times later in the chapter. God says, "Go into the land I'm about to **give** you. This is the land I swore to **give** your ancestors. I'll **give** you every place where you set your foot." The land is given as a gift of God's grace. It's not something we earn. It's not given as a reward for our efforts.

Notice how entering the land involves two crossings through water. When they fled from Egypt they passed through the Red Sea; now as they get ready to move into the Promised Land they'll pass through the waters of the Jordan River. In both cases God miraculously parts the waters for them. In the same way, as Christ-followers, we entered our new life in Christ through the waters of baptism. Our baptism symbolizes we've died to sin. We've left the old life behind in Egypt. It's been buried with Christ! Now we've been raised up with Christ; we're alive to God. As we enter Canaan and begin our life in Christ we're a new creation. All this is a gift. We didn't earn it. *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Eph. 2:8).

Why is this such a crucial part of the bigger picture as we enter the land? Because the temptation is always there for us to think we have to earn it; that it's all on us. This can lead to despair when we realize we **don't** have what it takes, or it can lead to pride when we experience a degree of victory. I love what God said to the Israelites back in Deuteronomy. God said, *"Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people"* (Deut. 9:6). That's true of each of us. We're stiff-necked. Any progress we make is a gift.

It's like Christmas. Someone who loves you goes shopping and picks out just the right gift. It's a costly gift but you mean so much to them they gladly pay the price for it. They wrap it and place it under the tree. On Christmas morning you eagerly begin to unwrap it. When you see what's inside, you're so excited, but instead of thanking the person who gave it to you, you say to

everyone in the room, "Did you just see what I did? I just unwrapped that gift? Aren't I amazing? If I hadn't done that, I'd never know what was inside! I guess I earned this gift."

That sounds ridiculous, but I've done it. Moving from a grace-based life to an earning-based life happens very subtly in my life, so I have to pay attention. It's too easy for me to move away from how I started. I started by grace through faith. Paul says, *"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him"* (Col 2:6). How did you receive him? By grace through faith. Does that change? No! Continue to live your life on that principle. What helps me do that is to take time to remember what God has done for me; to practice gratitude. Giving thanks each day primes the pump of a grace based life.

Even Though the Land is Given as a Gift, It Must be Taken in Battle

The second aspect of the bigger picture is even though the land is a gift, it must be taken in battle. God says, *"I will give you every place where you set your foot."* You must set foot on it before it becomes yours. We know when we set foot in the land we enter a battle; we have to fight, and that's not easy because there are giants and fortified cities in the land. Our first instinct is fear. If we're going to make progress in taking the land, we'll have to face our fears.

We must be strong and courageous

Fear was Joshua's first instinct. That's why God's main encouragement to Joshua is *"Be strong and courageous."* God says that in verse 6 and then in verse 7 he says, *"Be strong and VERY courageous."* Finally, down in verse 18 the people say to Joshua, *"Only be strong and courageous!"* Joshua must have thought, "Okay, I get the message!" You don't say that to someone who's confident and bold, but to someone who's shaking in his boots; who desperately needs to hear those words. When people are afraid, what do they need? They need encouragement. When we're afraid, we need encouragement more than advice. We usually know what we're supposed to do, but we lack the courage to do it. Joshua will get advice later on, but for now he needs encouragement. The Lord understands this. The Lord understands us. He understands our fears and he encourages us to be strong and courageous.

We have God's promise to be with us

There are two things that will help do that. First, there's a promise. God says three times, *"I will be with you."* In verse 5 he says, *"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you."* In verse 9 God says, *"Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."* And then again in verse 17 the people say back to Joshua, *"...may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses."* The same promise is given to us. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus gave us this promise. Right before he ascended, he sent

us out to make disciples and said, *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”* (Matt. 28:20).

Do you know how practical this is? Hebrews 13 says, *“Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have.”* Do you ever struggle with being content with what you have? How can we possibly do that? Look what he says next, *“... because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”* Those words are taken right out of Joshua. Though he’s talking about money, this can be applied to so many things. There’s no need to be afraid. God says, “I’m with you and I’m enough.” I’m with you in the loneliness of singleness. I’m with you in the challenges of marriage. I’m with you in the exhaustion of motherhood. I’m with you when your career goes south. We know the One who says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Isn’t that enough?

This is a truth we only learn through experience. It’s not until we fight a few battles that we really internalize this truth. As I’ve gotten older I’ve found I’m a very fearful person. My mind will often immediately go to the worst thing that can happen. But again, as I get older, one thing I have is a track record of seeing God show up for me in the hardest times. As a result, I’m learning to trust him. Some of you are in the midst of one of those times. You may feel alone, but you’re not alone. You can be strong and courageous because he’ll never leave you.

We have God’s Word to obey

Another thing that will help us be strong and courageous is God’s Word. God says to Joshua, *“Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you... Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.”* The Lord tells Joshua to obey his law, to take God at his word at every point; not just the easy parts, but every part.

Let me show you how this played out after they crossed the Jordan River and entered the land. The first thing that happened is in 5:2-3, *“...the Lord said to Joshua, ‘Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.’ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.”* Imagine this. You’ve just crossed the Jordan River, you’re getting ready to fight a huge battle, and what does God say? “Circumcise all the men!” Not such a great way to get ready for a battle! Imagine how the Giants would have played in the World Series if Coach Bruce Bochy had them all circumcised beforehand! God had told Abraham circumcision was to be the sign of the covenant, but the parents of the second generation born in the wilderness never bothered to circumcise their sons. That’s flat out disobedience. So before they go to battle, they have to take care of some rather sensitive business.

You know what the next thing they did was? They celebrated the Passover. Look at 5:10, *“On the evening of the fourteenth day*

of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover.” So there they are, getting ready to fight Jericho, one of the oldest and most powerful city/states in Canaan with massive fortified walls, and they’re roasting a lamb! But God told them that’s what you do on that day. You commemorate what I’ve done for you. Obedience! God’s instructions don’t always makes a lot of sense to us, but we don’t get a vote.

That’s still not all. In chapter 6 God gives precise instructions to Joshua about how to conquer Jericho. Talk about an unusual strategy! They were to march around the city for six days. On the seventh day they’d blow their trumpets and the walls would come down, allowing the Israelite soldiers to go in and take the city. If they obeyed every last detail of God’s instructions they were assured victory. God wants us to obey his word, even when it doesn’t make sense in our little minds, even when it seems we could come up with a better way. The Lord will do what he says he’ll do. Our job is just to believe and obey.

In chapter 1 God tells Joshua to keep his word on your lips (to speak it); to meditate on it day and night so you do everything it says. Psalm 119:11, *“Your word I have treasured (hidden) in my heart, that I may not sin against You.”* The place for God’s Word isn’t lying on your coffee table or your desk. The place for God’s word is on your lips and in your mind and heart. Constant, careful absorbing of God’s word leads to obedience.

We’ve seen the land is given by God as a gift and not taken by our own efforts. But we’ve also seen that even though the land is given as a gift, it must be taken in battle. So we need to be strong and courageous, trusting that God is with us, and we need to obey his word.

Victory is Assured Because God Fights for Us

We can now complete the big picture with this third statement: Victory is assured because God fights for us. Of course that takes into account all we’ve already learned. God won’t fight for us if we insist on doing things our own way, but as we move out in faith and obedience, we have him fighting for us. How could we lose? As Paul said, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Rom. 8:31).

Joshua needed to hear this. In chapter 5 a Man comes to him.

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?”

“Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”

The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so (verses 13–15).

Many believe this is an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ. But Joshua didn't know who he was. He's thinking, "Who is this guy? I hope he's on my side. I could use a guy like that!" He asks, "Are you for us or against us?" Don't you love his answer? "Neither." Literally, he just says, "No." "Are you for us or against us?" "No." Joshua is thinking that's not one of the choices I gave you. During the Civil War a reporter asked President Lincoln, "Do you think God is on the side of the Union or the Confederacy?" With no hesitation, Lincoln said, "The question isn't if God is on our side, young man. The question is if we're on his side." That's what the Lord says to Joshua, "I'm a commander of the army of the Lord." And then, just as God had said to Moses at the burning bush, he tells him to remove his sandals because this was holy ground.

With the Lord fighting for them, Israel went in and over the next seven years, for the most part, conquered the land, although mop-up operations continued for years after. This was, quite literally, holy war; some even call it genocide. It's hard for us to swallow. How could God order the killing of all men, women and children? It's important we understand a few things about this: the people of Canaan were exceedingly wicked and with them in the land Israel would no doubt adopt many of their detestable practices (Lev. 18:24–30). God had given them time to repent, but they hadn't done so (Gen. 15:13–16). God was using the Israelites as instruments of judgment against them. This was, in fact, a preview of the final judgment. By the way, God would later use the Babylonians as instruments of judgment against Israel when they disobeyed him. It's also important to understand this practice, called *herem*, was only used at certain times in Israel's history and wasn't something future generations were **not** to practice.

When Jesus came 1400 years later, he came to fight a far more important battle; a spiritual battle. Col. 2:15 says of Jesus, "***And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.***" Jesus, a mighty warrior, strong and courageous, waged war against "powers and authorities" that hold people captive, and he defeated them.

Today we're engaged in a holy war against spiritual powers. Paul says, "***For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms***" (Eph. 6:12). We're in a battle and we should fight to have sin and evil completely eradicated from our lives. What are the enemies keeping you from his rest? Fear? Depression? Anger? Lust? Addiction? Guilt? Go home and write down one or two enemies you'd like to eradicate. We can't take on all the enemies at once, but we can take on a few.

And we can fight with confidence. We know Jesus will come again as a warrior, and this time he'll eradicate evil forever. John described it this way, "***I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords***" (Rev. 19:11–16).

We know ultimate victory will come. We're still fighting. But it's important to know who's going to win when you go out to war. Watching a video of that seventh game of the World Series is very different now that we know who won the game. This is the confidence we have as we face our battles. We know who wins! So God says to each of us, "Be strong and courageous! I'll be with you; I'll never leave you nor forsake you. No one will be able to stand against you."

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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