



In 2014 Meriam Ibrahim, a 27-year-old Sudanese woman, spent six months in a Sudanese prison, shackled to the floor, and was sentenced to death for refusing to renounce her Christian faith. She was accused of converting from Islam to Christianity and then marrying a Christian man. She was also sentenced to one hundred lashes for having a child with her Christian husband. All of this could have been avoided if Meriam would have simply denied Jesus, as many before her had done in order to escape punishment and a death sentence. But Meriam refused to recant her faith and without ever compromising her commitment to Christ, she was later released.¹ When interviewed she said, “The situation was difficult but I was sure God would stand by my side.”

I know that is an extreme story and most of us will never face this, but when reading her story this week I was struck by the assurance she had that God would be right there with her through it all. It made me wonder if I have the same type of assurance, that no matter what happens, God will be by my side? What about you? Do you have that kind of hope? Have you ever considered what it means to “be strong and courageous” as you live out your Christian faith in an ever increasing hostile world? I talk to so many of you who are struggling. Struggling with marriage problems, or health problems, or family issues, or parenting concerns, and in it all deep down you’re wondering how to be strong and courageous when everything seems to be falling apart. In the quiet moments you’ve asked yourself, “Where is God in all this?” I find myself there more than I want to admit.

We open up a new teaching series this morning on the book of Joshua that will go into the New Year. Joshua comes right after what we call The Pentateuch or the first five books of the Bible. Joshua is one of the most action-packed, and at times, controversial books in the whole Bible, and it provides a historical look at Israel as they enter into the land God promised to Abraham centuries before.

This morning’s passage serves as the introduction to the book and it begins with the installation of Joshua as Israel’s new leader. We are going to look at all of chapter one today and the main point of this whole chapter and actually much of the book is: the Lord is with you. It hammers us with the idea that the Lord is with you. Through every bit of pain, every doubt, every failure, every battle. Through every one of Satan’s schemes to deceive, guilt, and destroy you, the Lord your God is with you. And the passage this morning gives us three appropriate reactions to the Lord being with you.

Be Strong and Courageous

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” (verses 1-9).

The first appropriate reaction to the Lord being with you is to be strong and courageous. The chapter starts with “after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord...” The book immediately before this, Deuteronomy, ends describing Moses’ last words and his death, and the book of Joshua picks up right where Deuteronomy leaves off. Moses is actually mentioned 60 times in the book of Joshua and 11 of them happen in the opening chapter.

And it’s because this moment that we enter into is one of the most pivotal moments in Israel’s history. Moses is the man that God raised up to lead his people. Moses emancipated God’s people from a cruel dictator. He brought manna from heaven and water from a rock in the desert so they wouldn’t starve or die of thirst. He was their top military commander, and most importantly, he was the only one who communicated directly with God. Moses was their patriarch, their leader. He was the last of a generation, and arguably the greatest man that had ever lived. And he had just died. This was an intensely emotional time for the people of Israel. It’s like that scene in *Lord of the Rings* when Gandalf falls into the abyss in the mines of Moria. For the survivors, although they haven’t reached their destination, they worry that their journey is already over. This is where Israel is in our passage.

But the text quickly ties Joshua as Moses’ successor. “*After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide...*” Joshua is literally defined by his relationship to Moses, as if to say, “but don’t worry, there is a new Moses.” A new leader, a new intermediary between God and God’s people.

¹ <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/09/15/sudanese-christian-woman-sentenced-to-death-says-had-god-by-her-side.html>

With a seriousness and a matter-of-fact-ness God says to Joshua, *“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 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.”*

God doesn't flinch at the death of Moses, his appointed leader. He isn't up there looking down saying, “Oh no! Moses is dead! What am I going to do?” Sometimes we think that when God's appointed leaders die, or they fall into sin (which Moses had done), God is up there despondent and despairing. No. When Billy Graham dies, or when Martin Luther King died, or when Jonathan Edwards died, or when Moses the servant of the Lord died, you know what God said? “Next!”

God's work does not halt because a man that he formed—gave breath, a man whom he raised up, a man whom he led, gave his power and Spirit to—dies. God's work continues through the next person God raises up, and the next, and the next, and the next. Moses may have been the greatest man who ever lived, but Moses wasn't Israel's true leader. God was. And Moses didn't deliver them from Egypt, God did. Moses didn't give them bread and water in the wilderness, God did. So when Moses dies, God says, “Next!” And the next person up to lead Israel was Joshua. God tells him, get ready. Get my people ready. Moses led you out of Egypt but my work is not done.

God's people still needed to take the land God had promised to them, the land he calls their inheritance. It is a land that God had originally promised to give to Abraham and to Moses, and now God will show himself to be faithful to that promise by leading his people into that land.

But while God is giving his people the land, they still have a role in taking it. God implicitly assures Joshua what he already knows—there will be opposition. The Canaanites and the Hittites and others who occupy that land will oppose God's plans, and so the Lord exhorts Joshua to be strong and courageous.

Joshua is actually exhorted four times in this passage to be strong and courageous—three times by God, and one by some of God's people. This phrase “be strong and courageous” is used multiple times in the Old Testament, and every time it is used, it affirms the Lord's presence with the person who is supposed to be strong and courageous. Joshua isn't supposed to just muster up courage inside himself because courage is a necessary virtue in a leader. He is supposed to be strong and courageous because he believes, he trusts, he is sure that the Lord God is with him. That the Lord will go before him into the land. That the Lord will fight for his people. And that the Lord is stronger than any enemy he will encounter. If the Lord is not with Joshua, his courage is folly, silly, stupid, and there is no reason for its praise. It is the assurance of the Lord's presence that musters strength and courage inside Joshua and us.

But this courage, this trust in God's presence, is not supposed to result in a puffed-out chest and a positive attitude. God calls Joshua to reveal his courage. *“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's courage is immediately and irrevocably tied to Joshua's obedience to the law of God. It uses a series of strong statements. “Be careful to obey,” “do not turn from it to the right or to the left,” “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.” You might be thinking, this seems a little bit excessive. I mean, after all, what does the law of God (and in this case, the book of Deuteronomy), have to do with taking the land God is giving them? To answer that objection, we need to understand a couple of things.

This command would have stung Joshua and all of God's people a little bit. God says, *“Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you to do.”* There is irony here because while Moses gave the law to the people of God, Moses did not obey the law perfectly. Moses sinned against God by taking measures into his own hands in the wilderness rather than trusting in God. It is this disobedience specifically that keeps Moses from entering the promised land himself. And when Joshua heard God exhort him to obey the law, and he heard Moses' name in the same sentence, he surely would have thought of that incident. It's a warning, a stinging warning, that God cares about his leaders and his people obeying the law.

But why does God care so much about obedience to the law? Two reasons of increasing importance. First, God cares that Joshua keep the law because it is by obedience to the law that Joshua shows his trust that the Lord is with him. In other words, it is by keeping the law that Joshua act strongly and courageously. That is why God puts the two lines next to each other. “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you.” They are, in fact, the same thing. It is an act of courage to obey the law of God.

But the second reason is even more fundamental than the first. God cares about obedience to the law because God's giving of the land to his people was never about his people having the land in the first place. God did not promise the land to Abraham because he was especially fond of Abraham and Abraham was an especially good boy this year and so he gave him a present, a strategically important desert on the east side of the Mediterranean. No. God gave Abraham the land, and if you were here last week you'll recognize this verse, so that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” God's people, in the land God gave them, were always supposed to be blessing and a witness to the people around them and a beacon of the glory of God so that the nations around them might know Him.

The law is God's fingerprint, a revelation of his holiness, his otherness. So if God's people enter the land he promised them

and they do not obey the law he revealed himself through, the peoples of the earth would be no better off than before. Which is why Joshua's obedience to the law is so important to God, and why God ties Joshua's obedience to the law directly to his success.

So what does that mean for us? God promised us as well that he is with us. He is with you. And that should inspire you to be strong and courageous, and not just in an ethereal or abstract sense. We should meditate on the law of God—on the Bible—so that we are careful to do everything written in it. How often are you picking this book up and reading it? Not just reading it, but meditating on it carefully? You must **know** how to be strong and courageous before you can **be** strong and courageous.

The Lord is giving us our inheritance. Our inheritance isn't land, although that would be nice here on the Peninsula! Our inheritance is a new heaven and a new earth. It is the kingdom of God come in full, as Jesus promised, and rest from a broken world. And so, as God's people we must take that inheritance. We must be courageous in telling people about the kingdom of God, in creating places where love and kindness, and patience, and joy exude in boldly proclaiming truth and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My prayer for us, and I hope your prayer as well, is that of the believers in Acts chapter 4. After Peter and John were imprisoned and beaten for telling people about the kingdom of God, the believers pray this: "Now Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." They prayed for boldness! For courage.

Prepare to Take What God is Giving You

Because the Lord is with you, you should also prepare to take what God is giving you. Look with me at verses 10 and 11.

So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own.'"

Joshua, after being commissioned by God and told to get God's people ready to take their inheritance, jumps in telling them to prepare. God's people have been waiting for a long time. They waited for 400 years for God's deliverance from slavery. Then they waited 40 years while they wandered in the desert. Now they have been waiting on the edge of their inheritance to cross over the Jordan River and take it. Now the Israelites have three days to prepare to go in and take what the Lord is giving them. This moment links Joshua again to Moses, his predecessor. Like Moses, Joshua is going to lead the Israelites through a body of water by God's power.

But there are two huge differences between the first time the Israelites crossed a body of water, the Red Sea, and the second time, the Jordan River. The first difference is that when they crossed the Red Sea the Israelites were fleeing **from** something, from Egypt. But now, the Israelites are going **to** something, the Promised Land. The second difference is that when they crossed the Red Sea, they did not have any preparation time.

In fact, Moses had instructed the Israelites to eat their dinners with their sandals on so they would be ready to run, and they make unleavened bread (bread without yeast) so that it could be prepared quickly. But this time is different. This time, God's people have time to prepare for the crossing. They are not fleeing wildly away from slavery but marching resolutely toward rest and inheritance.

The same is true for us as Christians. We have been delivered from slavery. Jesus' death broke us free from the harsh chains of sin, and his resurrection broke us free from the cruel chains of death. We have fled from those oppressors through faith in Jesus, but we have not yet entered the rest and inheritance we have been promised. We have tasted it, but only a taste. We are the Israelites in the desert, on the cusp of the promised land. But now we have to, in faith, get ready to cross into our inheritance. We have not fled sin to die in the desert, but to enter a new land.

But we must prepare if we are to be successful. We must put on the full armor of God, as Paul says. *"Therefore put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvations and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..."* (Eph. 6:13-18).

Cultivate these things. Prepare for the battle, not against flesh and blood, but against the ruler, authorities, powers, and spiritual forces of evil in this dark world and the heavenly realms. Prepare to take what God has given you. A battle is coming; may we not be found unprepared. Because the Lord is with you prepare to take what he is giving you, and be strong and courageous as you do.

Follow God's Appointed Leaders

The third appropriate reaction to the Lord being with you is to follow God's appointed leaders. This might seem odd, but look with me at verses 12-18.

But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, "Remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you after he said, 'The Lord your God will give you rest by giving you this land.' Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, ready for battle, must cross over ahead of your fellow Israelites. You are to help them until the Lord gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land the Lord your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise."

Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your word and does not

obey it, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!"

Something interesting happens here. For context, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh are what we call the trans-Jordan tribes, which literally means "across the Jordan." Most of Israel's inheritance was on the west side of the Jordan River, but these two-and-a-half tribes have their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. And because their inheritances are on the east side of the Jordan, they already are living in the places they are supposed to. Moses led them into that territory, but when he did, all the people of Israel helped the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh win that territory. So Moses made these tribes promise that when it was time to go across the Jordan and for the other tribes to inherit their land, the trans-Jordan tribes would help.

Well, now that time has come, but the agreement they had made was with Moses, not Joshua. So while God commissioned Joshua as Moses' rightful successor, the people, and especially these trans-Jordan tribes, didn't have to recognize that. So Joshua is in a fairly precarious position with these tribes. It's a little bit like when Abraham Lincoln was elected president and southern states began seceding from the Union. Transitions in leadership are always precarious.

So Joshua goes to these trans-Jordan tribes and reminds them of their oath to Moses and to the Lord. He reminds them that there isn't really a leadership transition happening here—it is still the Lord leading his people and giving them their rest. And the trans-Jordan tribes respond to Joshua saying, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go." There is a recognition that God has raised Joshua up to lead his people in place of Moses, and so they will obey him. And in doing so, they confirm the call of God on Joshua.

But they don't give their loyalty over freely with two "only's." They say, "only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses." And "Only be strong and courageous." You see, the trans-Jordan tribes recognize that Joshua is God's appointed leader, and they agree to follow him wherever he says, but not blindly. They make it clear that they will follow him only so long as the Lord is with him and he is strong and courageous.

It's a little ironic because if you know Israel's history these tribes were notorious rebels against God, but at least at this point, they are sincere in their faith. God regularly appoints leaders to lead his people. Human beings to whom he calls, for a time, to move his people from one place to another. And as God's people we should say, "wherever you send us we will go." Only may the Lord be with you, and be strong and courageous. Because if the Lord is with those leaders then we should follow them and obey them.

Here at CPC what that means practically is that we ought to obey the elders and follow them where they lead us. God has appointed our elders to lead us. At North that is Rob, Frank Cutter, and Michael Farbstein. When I interviewed for this job, the church flew me and Michelle out here and I interviewed with the elders. Actually Michelle was invited to the interview as well,

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

and they interviewed me over lunch for about an hour and a half. And after the interview I remember getting in the car with Michelle and saying, "I don't know if we are going to get the job or not, but I am really glad there is a church on the Peninsula being led by those men." The more I have gotten to know the elders, the more I have been persuaded that they are full of the Holy Spirit, walking with the Lord, and leading this church where he would have us go, even when it requires strength and courage. In short, that the Lord our God is with them. And because of that, we should follow them and obey them.

The Lord is with us. The Lord is with you. We ought to hear that as a rally cry this morning. A reason to courageously follow God, through his leaders into our inheritance, the kingdom of God.

When I was in AP US History in high school I learned an interesting fact that I have never forgotten. For some reason this fact, among all of the facts I was bombarded with in that class, stuck. Of the 44 presidents in US history how many have delivered on all of their campaign promises? One. One president—James Polk. His promises weren't extraordinarily complicated—he vowed to establish the Independent Treasury System, reduce tariffs, acquire some of Oregon, and all of California and New Mexico. Every other president failed to deliver on at least one of their campaign promises.

And unfortunately, we are going to find the same is true of Joshua. Joshua is often hailed as one of the heroes of the Bible, but in reality he never takes all the land that God lays out in this passage. The people under his command disobey God. He makes a treaty with some of the people of the land when he is explicitly told not to. And after Joshua dies, Israel slowly unravels. For all of Joshua's successes, he ultimately fails to realize God's inheritance and he ultimately fails as a leader of God's people.

But the good news today is that God has not abandoned us. God has raised up a new leader, a better Joshua. A man who is truly strong and courageous, who obeys the law perfectly, and who can actually take God's people into the kingdom of God. His name is Jesus. Jesus is the new and better Joshua. In fact, the name Jesus is actually just the Greek rendering of the name Joshua, which means, "Yahweh saves." And it is Jesus, the servant of the Lord, who leads us. It is Jesus who, by his perfect obedience to the law has become your righteousness. It is Jesus, who by his death of the cross has crucified has driven Satan away and won your freedom. It is Jesus, who by his resurrection has given you life and an inheritance that cannot be stolen away. It is Jesus who straps the armor of God on you for battle. It is Jesus who makes you strong and courageous. It is Jesus who assures you, "I will never leave you or forsake you. I will be with you always, even to the end of the age."

And if God was willing to send Jesus to do all of that while you were still a sinner, far from God, then it is because of Jesus that you can boldly leave here today trusting fully that the Lord is with you.

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