



Because this is Vision Sunday I only have time for a short message today. This will be a 20 minute message. You're probably thinking, "Right! You've never given a 20 minute message in your life." But I'll do my best.

What I want to try to do in these 20 minutes is relate all you've already heard this morning to what we've been learning from the book of Joshua. We've already seen the theme of Joshua is found in the charge: be strong and courageous! I believe at this juncture as a church these words apply to us more than ever.

Consider the parallels between what was happening to them and what's happening to us today.

### **The Israelites were Facing a Season of Both Change and Challenge**

Joshua was being called by God to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. Forty years earlier Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. They crossed the Red Sea and eventually came to the edge of the Promised Land. God told them to go in and take it; he promised them victory, but they chickened out. Instead of trusting God, they let fear control them. As a result they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, eating something called manna. Manna means "what is it?" because when the Israelites first saw it they said, "what is it?" It wasn't until that whole generation of adults died off in the wilderness that God said it was time for the next generation to go in and do what their fathers failed to do—take the land. The book of Joshua begins with that next generation of Israelites poised to do just that.

What's important for us to understand is this was a season of both change and challenge for the Israelites which is very similar to what we're experiencing today at CPC.

Consider all the change:

There was a change of leadership. Moses died and he passed the baton of leadership to Joshua. When there's a change of leadership, there's always the potential of instability. How do we know this new guy has what it takes? That's why several times in Joshua God says to the people, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with Joshua.

There was also a change of location. They'd be entering a land their forefathers lived in over 400 years earlier. That's a long time! Where were **your** forefathers 400 years ago? Imagine going back there! They had no idea what to expect in this land. Where would they live? How would they survive?

In fact, another change would come in how they'd be provided for. As I said, they subsisted on manna for 40 years. That's all they knew. But once they crossed the Jordan, the gravy train was over. From that day on, they'd eat from the produce of the land, which would be an improvement in terms of variety, but it would require a little sweat as well. It would be a change, and change can be hard.

Not only was it a season of change, it was also a season of challenge. There were Canaanites living in that Land. These were big, scary and well-equipped people. They had horses, chariots, and the strategic advantage of knowing the land. They would not welcome the Israelites with open arms, but fight for every inch of ground they had.

But that wasn't even the biggest challenge. How would Israel remain spiritually pure in the midst of a pagan people? These Canaanites worshipped a pantheon of gods and engaged in detestable practices like child sacrifice. Over and over God warned his people to be separate from them; not to intermarry with them or worship their gods.

### **CPC is Facing a Season of Both Change and Challenge as Well**

As we think about where we're at as a church body, it's not much different. We're also in a season of change and challenge. As with Israel, there are changes in our leadership. We're looking for a new Campus Pastor for our South Campus. Rob will become the new Lead Pastor of our North Campus. We're also looking for new leadership in Student Ministries on two of our campuses: Foster City and South. There are also changes in location. Our South Campus is looking for a new place to meet; somewhere they can call their own seven days a week. Our North Campus only has a year-to-year lease and would love to get a more sustainable facility. To find something like that here on the Peninsula for over 1000 people isn't easy!

How will God provide? Just like the Israelites faced changes in God's provision as they entered the land, so will we. Our facility challenges come with a huge price tag. As our North Campus becomes independent, they'll no longer be dependent on CPC. We're looking at capital campaigns next year, both at CPC and at the New North church.

All of this change also means challenge. Honestly, it's not the facility and financial challenges that concern me the most,

but rather the spiritual challenges. Last year research done by the Barna Group found the Bay Area has the least church-going population of any place in America. We're surrounded by people who are wealthy, educated and busy. We have great Sunday brunches, beautiful Bay views, spectacular coastal hikes, but less people plugged in to a church than anywhere in the nation. And even those who are plugged in to a church only show up about twice a month. The greatest challenge we have come 2,000 years ago from the Apostle Paul: *"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect"* (Rom. 12:2).

So we face huge challenges as a church. Much like the Israelites of old, we're entering new territory. Most people are afraid of the unknown. Those things we've never seen or experienced can seem overwhelming. On the old maps, back before the world was understood in modern terms, map makers would put down what they knew, but at the edges of the map, beyond which they had no knowledge, they'd often write, "Beyond here, there be dragons." Well, we're entering that place they called "Beyond here."

## **In the Midst of This, God Charges Us to be Strong and Courageous**

That's why we must take to heart this command to be strong and courageous. I did a study this week of all the places that charge is found in this story. It started back in Deuteronomy:

Moses charged Israel: **Be strong and courageous.** *"Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Dt. 31:6).

Moses charged Joshua: **Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged"** (Dt. 31:7-8).

God charged Joshua: **Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I myself will be with you"** (Dt. 31:23). God charged Joshua (again): **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... Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go"** (Josh. 1:6-9).

Israel's soldiers charged Joshua: *"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!"* (Josh. 1:17-18).

Joshua charged the Israelites: **"Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous"** (Josh. 10:25).

### **The charge isn't just for a few, but all of God's people**

Notice this charge to be strong and courageous isn't just for Joshua. On at least two occasions it was given to all Israel. This tells me this is for all of us, not just our leaders. In the NT we read about the body of Christ and how each part of the body has a crucial role to play. We believe in something called the priesthood of all believers, which means through Jesus we've all been given access to God through Christ, and every believer has equal responsibility to serve God. We're all in this together. God says to all of us, "Be strong and courageous."

### **This charge involves both negative and positive commands**

Notice also this charge involves both positive and negative commands. The positive side we've looked at—be strong and courageous. But there's also a negative. Repeatedly, God says, "do not fear" and "do not be discouraged (dismayed)." The word fear is a strong term. It means to be so terrified we tremble. Discouraged or dismayed speaks of brokenness. It describes people whose courage has been shattered and who are demoralized. The only way we'll be thwarted from accomplishing God's purpose for us is by our own fear and allowing circumstances to demoralize us. Fear and dismay are hard to conquer. Many of us fear situations that are new, or where we're not in control of the outcome, or where we don't feel adequate to meet whatever challenge lies before us. We fear the edges of the map that say, "Beyond here, there be dragons."

### **This charge is given to people who are underdogs**

But let me make one thing clear: this charge is given to people who really don't have what it takes in themselves to pull this off. Sometimes we think Israel was this big bully who went into Canaan and kicked those weak people out. But the reality is, Israel was the consummate underdog. They're like a Pop Warner football team taking on the mighty New England Patriots. They're a nation of slaves going against an empire. They got their butts kicked in Egypt for 400 years, then they wandered in the wilderness for 40 more years, and now they're confronting the most well-equipped armies of the day. They're one tiny nation standing in the shadow of Canaan, a devourer of peoples. Israel should get creamed!

In light of that, you can understand why Israel would say, *"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God"* (Psalm 20:7). Can we say that? It's so important we understand we don't have what it takes to pull this off ourselves. When we're told to "Be strong," that means we feel weak in ourselves. When we're told to "Be courageous,"

that means we feel cowardly. It's when we're in that condition of weakness and vulnerability that God calls us to trust in him.

I think many of us are too strong for him to use; too full of our own schemes, plans, and ways of doing things. So often he has to empty us, humble us before he raises us up. I have a huge concern for the church in America, and this applies to our church as well. My concern is we think if we just have the right worship music, the right venue with a hip vibe, really cool pastors who wear skinny jeans, cutting edge technology, then we'll be successful. But that is a lie.

### **This charge rests not on our own abilities but on three things**

You see, this charge rests not on our own abilities but on three things only God can provide.

The first is God's promises. Remember what God said to Joshua, *"Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath..."* (Dt. 31:23). As far back as the call of Abraham, God promised his people this land. And God worked through the centuries to confirm his promise. God had a history of faithfulness to his promises these people could look back to. God delivered them from slavery and provided for them in the wilderness.

We have promises too. Our Lord promised **he** will build his church; that's true of **our church** (Mt. 16:18). He's promised his words won't fail to produce a harvest (Is. 55:8-13). He's promised the power of the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). God is faithful!

Next year CPC will celebrate our 50th anniversary. In 1967 five families from PBC in Palo Alto started meeting for a Bible study up here. Soon we were a fledgling church meeting at CSM (College of San Mateo), the FC Community Center, a bank and Bowditch Middle School. In 1970 a few families put their resources together and purchased two acres of land in Foster City. It cost \$40,000 and it was a tremendous sacrifice. Sixteen years later, after raising 3 million dollars, we began to build on that land. In 1989 we started meeting there in the MPR on Sunday mornings with about 350 people. Over the next 12 years we continued to grow and eventually busted out of that little room in Foster City. After another capital campaign we added our current auditorium and parking garage in FC. Another decade went by and with no room left to grow in FC we became a multi-campus church. In 2008 we started our North Campus and in 2012 our South

Campus. Next year we'll launch a church with 1000 people on the North Peninsula, one of the hardest places in the country to start a church! God is faithful to his promise to build his church!

The second thing we have is God's word. God said to Joshua, *"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"* (Josh. 1:8). This isn't some kind of wooden command to read and obey the Bible; this is about survival. Have you ever been in the midst of a really difficult time, and somehow God brings his word and it's just cool water to your soul on a blistering hot day? It strengthens you. It sustains you. It refreshes you. Psalm 19:7-8 says, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes."* Why can we be strong and courageous? Because we have his Word to refresh us, instruct us, enlighten us and give us joy. CPC has always been and will continue to be a church rooted in God's Word. His Word isn't just a rule book; it's a life support system!

The third thing we have is God's presence. Over and over again, when God says to be strong and courageous, he adds, "I will be with you. I will go before you. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you." That brings us back to God's promises. That's one of his promises. And where do we find his promises? We find them in his Word. So we have these three things working very closely together: God's promises are found in God's Word, and one of his promises is his continued presence. That's where our confidence lies.

So if this is your church, I say to you, be strong and courageous. Move forward towards the edges of the map. Come with us and help us take the land. Pray like crazy. Radically give of your time, treasure and talents. Find a place to serve that lights your heart on fire. Be strong and courageous. Do not fear. Do not be dismayed. You have his promises. You have his Word. You have his presence.

*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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