

The Ark: Promises

The Ark

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Bible Text: Joshua 1:1-9

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If you are a first time guest or visitor, we continue this week in our summer sermon series going through the Old Testament and looking at this famous item known as the Ark of the Covenant that was only 16 cubic feet in size. Though covered in a layer of gold, it represented not just inside and not just in monetary value, but it represented the specific, powerful presence of God. And today as we come to week three we are in Joshua chapter one and you are going to see in just a moment when we read the text that the Ark of the Covenant is never even going to be mentioned. And you may be wondering to yourself, why is this passage so key. Why is it so important? Well, to use baseball terminology this is what we would call a tweener, a Texas leaguer, that which is between the outfield and the infield.

The last couple of weeks we have been in the book of Exodus and we have been seeing how God had the Israelites instructed or how he instructed them to build the Ark of the Covenant, what the Ark of the Covenant would do. They did everything the way they were supposed to. They prepared their lives. They said, "Okay, God, we did what you told us to do." Next week we are going to be in Joshua chapter 3 and we are going to stand in the river Jordan. The next week we are going to march around the walls of Jericho. And in between building the ark and marching the ark is Joshua chapter 1 with the decision not just to speak of the ark, not just to talk of the ark, but to actually live out the powerful presence of God. This is the week that in the course of the whole summer could be the most critical as far as content. It is not just acknowledging facts. It is not just acknowledging ideas. It is actually saying we desire to implement them in our lives. And at the end of the message today we are going to see what happens when we make the mistake of not following through with our actions when our words have spoken.

Joshua 1:1-9 says:

Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto

their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.¹

This is that passage of Scripture that says, “Okay, we need to be strong. We need to be courageous, because we are about to go wherever the presence of God takes us, whether it is through a river, whether it is around a city, whether it is in a battle that we know not of. We need to be prepared and say, ‘Okay, God, wherever you lead, wherever you go, much like Isaiah chapter 6, “I will be there and I will go there.””

Three simple concepts, though. How does this happen in our life? And the first one is this. We need to understand the magnitude of the promises of God. This whole chapter is about what God is promising them. He promises them if you do this, this will happen. I promise. If you do this, this will happen. So what is the magnitude? Well, the magnitude of God’s promises is that you and I have the opportunity to be overcomers. You know, 1 John 5:4 and 1 John 4:4 says that because of Jesus Christ in our life we have overcome the world. We talk a lot about that, but often times we don’t live much of an overcoming life.

I want you to see here in Joshua 1 what it says we are able to overcome. The first thing is we are able to overcome obstacles. Look in verse three. “Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you.”²

Not only is there obstacles that we have the opportunity to overcome because of the presence of God, but there is also opposition. Look in verse five. “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee.”³

Now for those of you that are first time guests and visitors, just endure me for a moment. This is a very trivial thing that I do on a somewhat regular basis. But it just reassures me that you are with me. I understand that the original Old Testament was written in Hebrew and I read it and study it in English and preach from it in English, but I just have to ask this question to make sure you are on the same page with me. In verse three when it says, “Every place,” church, what does the word every mean in Hebrew? Every. Okay, just making sure. In verse five when it says no man, to any many, what does the word any mean in Hebrew? Any. Good, good, good. So what that means is every place and not any man. So whatever the obstacle and whatever the opposition is, according to Joshua one,

¹ Joshua 1:1-9.

² Joshua 1:3.

³ Joshua 1:5.

the magnitude of the promises of God is that everywhere our foot goes and every person we run into or ever place we find ourselves that it is a powerful presence of God is moving and working in our lives, that there is not a wall high enough or thick enough or a person powerful enough to deter what God desires to do. The problem is when we decide to do it our own way. And we think that God needs our help.

You know, one of the things that Traci my wife and I have learned over the last 16 plus years of being married is there have been situations in our life where we have had obstacles. Sometimes those obstacles come in the form of number on a ledger sheet, i.e., finances. Sometimes those obstacles are individuals and persons, some related, some not. And you find yourself in a situation, maybe you have never been here, but I bet you have. We say, "Lord, I don't know how you are going to do this one. This is bigger than anything I know about. This is of more magnitude."

And when the Lord moves, when the Lord works either in a relationship or in something that we would call stationary such as an item or an object, have you ever stepped back and said, "I would have never done it that way?" And that is exactly right, because if we had done it the way we wanted to do, guess what would have happened. We would have messed it all up. And so what is going to happen later on in the Old Testament is God is going to say, "Here is the deal. If you want Jericho, march around it for seven days." We would have never have done that. He said, "You want the Jordan to part? Stand in the middle of it." That is nothing that we would ever do. And so what we see here is the magnitude of the promises of God.

Listen. There is not a struggle. There is not a problem. There is not an addiction. There is not a disease. There is not a person. That is why Romans chapter eight says that when it comes to the love that Jesus Christ has for us, neither is there height, neither is their depth, neither is there a person, neither is there an entity, neither is there even a principality that can keep us from the love of Jesus Christ. That is the magnitude of the promises of God.

Now some of you are thinking, that is great preaching, but that is hard living. How does that happen? Because, Jeff, you don't know my life. You don't know my circumstances. You don't know my situation.

I am glad you asked, because point number two is not just the magnitude, but the means of the promises of God. How does this actually get implemented in our lives? And to be honest with you, the answer which is so clear in the book of Joshua is so politically incorrect and so, according to the 21st century backwards.

Open with me to Joshua 1:7.

"Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, [of] Moses."⁴

⁴ Joshua 1:7.

The first meaning that God gives us is that we are to observe his Word. Now last time I checked, to observe anything you actually have to be in its presence, to be there. Did you observe that threat? Did you observe that crime? Did you observe that event? To observe something means to be in the presence of. That means that the first thing that has got to happen is that we actually have to be in the presence of the Word of God. When the Word of God is on the dashboard of your car in the garage and you are in the house, that does not count. To observe it means to have it in your hands or have it on your phone or whatever means you use to be able to actually observe it.

You know, someone that I have most have admired throughout history was a man from China by the name of Watchman Nee. Watchman Nee died a martyr's death in 1972 in a prison cell. He pastored a church for six years from prison by writing letters and sneaking them out. Watchman Nee from the time in which he was about his mid 20s till the day he died, he observed, he read what we know as the Word of God, the New Testament once a week for his entire life. And that is what I call observing. There have been times in my life where I have taken what I call a Nee week. Read the whole New Testament in a week. There has been very specific times in my life when I have had what I call a Nee weekend, from Friday through Sunday read the whole New Testament in one weekend. It can be done. I promise. I have done it a couple of times.

Do you know what happens when you begin to observe the Word of God? You begin to see what it really is instead of believing what it might not be. You begin to put all the pieces together and all the stories together. So many times people say, "Well, that part of the Bible doesn't work with that part of the Bible." When you read it all in one sitting you go, "Oh, the Lord actually does know what he is doing." And you begin to observe it.

So he says, "I want you to observe all the law." Remember the word all, right? All. But is not just observing. There is this second word, obeying. Now that is where the rubber hits the road right there. It is one thing to say I know what it says. It is another thing to actually do it, Verse eight "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."⁵

It is not just enough to know what it says, but to actually implement it in your life. Just last week my wife shared with me, you know, she reads all the time which is a wonderful problem, because she can read books I don't normally read and we share information together. She shared with me a definition for something I had never considered before. It was a definition of Legalism or a definition of Pharisaism and that is that group of people we give a hard time in the New Testament, those religious people. It was all about the dos and all about the don'ts. And when we start talking about observing the law, doing the Word of God, I think we have a tendency to fall into that legalistic trap. Listen to this definition she shared with me that Legalism or Pharisaism is setting a standard that with enough discipline and dedication you can actually make it. And that is why people who are pharisaical are very critical of other people, because they point at someone and say,

⁵ Joshua 1:8.

“You are just not as dedicated as I am. If you would just spend more time like I do, everything would be okay.”

That is a Pharisee. Guess what? I got news for all of us. It doesn't matter how much of the law that we actually do obey, we are all sinners. We are all messed up. And that is the message of grace that every one of us needs Jesus. It doesn't matter who Jesus ran into during the gospels. It could have been a beggar on the street or a high priest in the temple. He said, “Guess what? Both of you guys need me, because no matter how far you have come over your bar or how high you have gone over your bar, you desperately need a Messiah because you are a sinner.” It says not only are we to observe the Word, but we are actually to implement it. We are to obey it. And here is the thing that is critical for our generation and culture. When I say generation, I mean the time we are living in. It does not say the law that we like or the law that is convenient. According to verse eight all. Now one more time just endure me for a moment. What does the word all mean in Hebrew? Help me out here. All. Thank you. That means the parts we don't like, the parts that are considered out of date, the parts that are considered, well, you just look at it that way. No, that is not what it says. It says all of it.

And so here we go. We have got the magnitude. God says, “If you do what I say to do, these are the promises.” And we have got the means. Just do what I have told you to do.

By the way, in a couple of weeks when we come to Jericho, that is the craziest battle plan you have ever seen in your life. So what are the mistakes, what are the mistakes that can happen? Why is this not realized in your life? Why do we not live the promises of God? Why do we not go to the end of the day and say, “Today was a victorious day?” What are the mistakes that we can make? There are two very simple yet difficult mistakes that we make.

Mistake number one is our attitude toward the magnitude and the means; our attitude toward God's promises and our attitude toward the means by which he wants to accomplish his promises in our life. Now here is what I mean by attitude. Four times in this chapter: Be strong and of good courage.

Now forgive me. I do know that I come from the state of Texas, but I have learned that there are as many John Wayne fans in Georgia as there are in Texas. Let me give you the definition of courage according to John Wayne. Now I don't know if he actually originally said this, but it is attributed to him. He said that courage is being scared to death and saddled up anyway. Now that is a wonderful definition. When it says here, “Be strong and of good courage,” it is not saying, “Hey, you are going to like every bit of this and you are going to wake up every morning and say, ‘I cannot wait to serve the Lord.’”

No, it is saying, “You are going to wake up saying, ‘I am scared to death. How do I do this? How do I do that? How do I keep my mouth shut? How do I open my mouth? How do I do whatever it may be?’”

And so our attitude that we need to have in check, the attitude that we need to talk about is are we truly courageous? Are we scared to death by saying, “Okay, God, I will saddle up anyway”?

And then there is what I call the big mistake, not just the issue of our attitude, but the issue of our actions. What is the mistake that we could make when it comes to putting this all into practice, the promises of God? And I want you to turn over a few pages to Joshua chapter 11. As you are turning to Joshua chapter 11, let me share with you what has happened between chapter one and chapter two and next week we are going to be in chapter three, right in the mix of things. In chapter three the River Jordan is parted because they simply stand in it where God told them to stand. In chapter six Jericho falls down without a shot being fired because they did exactly what God told them to do. In chapter 10 there is a battle that takes place and the Israelites are scared. They are scared to death but they are saddling up anyway and they say, “God, we don’t know what to do. You have said every place we go, every battle we have, you said it would be the victory would be ours and it looks like we are going to be defeated.” And Joshua in chapter 10 says, “Lord, I need more time.” And it says that the Lord kept the sun up still for 24 hours.

Now can I just give you a hint? You can’t do that. You don’t have the capability of pulling off that plan. But the Lord did it. Why? Because he said, “If you will just be where I tell you to be and do what I tell you to do, watch what I pull off.”

When we get to chapter 11 it is really just a recounting of all the land that was conquered and all the people that were defeated. And there is just list after list after list and I want you to see what happens in verse 21 of Joshua 11. “And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims.”⁶

This is one of the groups of people that had God said, “Eliminate these folks.”

...from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities. There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained. So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance...⁷

Et cetera.

Isn’t that an interesting nugget that this group of people—remember it said all people and every place—yet there were three places that did not become a part of the every and there was one group that did not become a part of the all: Gaza, Gath, Ashdod and this group of people known as the Anakims. And let me tell you I bet what happened because I am a man and I am a human being and I can promise you they conquered 99.9 percent of the

⁶ Joshua 11:21.

⁷ Joshua 11:21-23.

land. They have eliminated 99.9 percent of the people and tucked up in the back corners of these small, little nobody has ever seen one stop light towns they said, “They are not going to make that much difference. It doesn't matter. It is not that big a deal.”

Honestly in Joshua chapter 11 it wasn't that big a deal. They weren't going to put up a fight. It wasn't going to be a real mess and it was not going to actually hinder what was happening in that day. The problem wasn't Joshua 11. The problem was what would happen in a generation. What would happen in two generations? What would happen in three generations as time went on? And that which we said, “God, it is not that big a deal. It won't fester.”

The last time I checked all major infections start from one small point. Let me tell you about these three places. Gaza, small little one bedroom community, a bunch of Amalekites that nobody cares about. They are not going to raise a mess. A couple of generations later there was a young lady who came out of Gaza. Her name was Delilah. Why was Delilah able to live? Because some of her forefathers were not eliminated. Delilah single handedly through her coercion and all of her words and manipulations, took down the man that we know as Samson, the judge with all of that strength.

There is another place by the name of Gath. You have never heard of Gath. And you say, “Who cares about Gath?” How could they have made any big difference? Did you know that there was an individual in the book of 1 Samuel 17 where a man who would one day become king, a man by the name of David stood and looked in the face of a man nine foot nine inches tall named Goliath and who had four brothers. They had six fingers on each hand, six toes on each foot, huge massive men. Guess where their home town was? That's right. Gath. It makes a difference when we say, “Oh, it is not that big a deal.”

And then there is Ashdod. You say, “Well, why is Ashdod a big deal?” Because Ashdod was the geographical location where the Philistines set up their false idol worship. All that stuff the Israelites fight year after year after year, guess where it came from? Ashdod. And so we look at the Gazas of our life. We look the Gaths of our life. We look at the Ashdods of our life and we look back and say, “Well, God, isn't 99 percent enough? It is not that big a deal.”

We are like Hezekiah in Isaiah chapter 39 who says these words. “As long as it is safe and secure in my lifetime, we will be okay.”

I could list several Gaths. I could list several Gazas. I could list several Ashdods in our culture and in particular in the Church of Jesus Christ. But can I share with you, I think, the one that has probably been the most overlooked, the most slighted and we look at it with well meaning hearts and say, “It is not that big a deal.” It is the impact that a man can have in a child's life.

I mean, after all, guys, I will be honest, I am ... I was not... thankfully we are... I wasn't good at the diaper thing. I will be honest. I am not good with the goo, goo, ga... I am not good at that. And, you know, the Lord knows that. But do you know what the key to the

whole story of the Ark of the Covenant? They weren't doing anything. They were simply being where God asked them to be. And what has happened in this generation—and I am afraid in the generations to come—is we have so said that men aren't that important in children's lives and men are not that important in young people's lives, that we are raising up some Gazas, some Gaths and some Ashdods and we have got young men and women without the impact of a man in their life, whether it be biological or not and you wonder why they have a hard time hearing the Bible say that God is your Father.

And they are saying, "I don't want that. I already had that. And that was bad."

Whether biological or not, I don't think any of us realize the impact that a man can have who is living for God, the presence of God in his life can have on a young person, whether they be male or female.