

# Preparing for Conquest Leadership

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For our scripture reading this evening, we turn to Joshua 1 and we read the entire chapter. This is both the reading and the text for this evening. Joshua 1. Hear now the word of the Lord. Joshua 1, beginning at verse 1 to the end of the chapter.

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. 5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." 10 And Joshua commanded the officers of the people, 11 "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, 'Prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess.'" 12 And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh Joshua said, 13 "Remember the word that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land.' 14 Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but all the men of valor among you shall pass over

armed before your brothers and shall help them, 15 until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as he has to you, and they also take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and shall possess it, the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise." 16 And they answered Joshua, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. 17 Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you, as he was with Moses! 18 Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous."

This truly is the word of the Lord. I encourage you to keep this passage open before you this evening as we consider it together.

Dear congregation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the book of Joshua in modern times does not get very high ratings. In a world today where the global village is the goal, a book that tells us that God commanded to destroy the Canaanites is disturbing. A book that apparently endorses genocide does not get high favorable ratings from this world. Perhaps you've seen, I don't know if this is found in western Michigan, but I've seen in the Chicago area cars that have the bumper sticker COEXIST. Coexist, and it uses the symbols of different religions to help spell out the word coexist. Can't we just all get along? But Christians always read the Bible in context, don't you? We never lift a story out of its context and then use it for whatever purposes we want. The book of Joshua records a particular chapter in God's ongoing program of reconquering the world through Christ, and therefore there is not a book where you read and you say, "Okay, God commands the destruction of the wicked. Let's go out and kill unbelievers." That's not how you read the book of Joshua because if you read a chapter like Deuteronomy 20 where it talks about how Israelites approach cities outside of Canaan, God tells his people, "When you go against another city, offer them terms of peace. Don't just come in with guns blazing and spears and swords flashing, offer them terms of peace, and if they refuse peace, then you engage in war. But then when you capture the city, don't massacre the women and children. And by the way, don't cut down the fruit trees. Your war is not against fruit trees." In other words, Deuteronomy 20 shows us that God is amazingly pro-life in the midst of times when there may be, Israelites might be conquering other cities.

We read the book of Joshua in context and this is the context: this land of Canaan belongs to Yahweh, it's his land, thank you very much. Let's get that straight, it's his land, and he chooses to give it to his people. They are the rightful inhabitants of the land but at this moment in time, there's other people living there, Canaanites, and so they must be removed. Yes, he does call for the extermination of Canaanites, but that's this moment in redemptive history. This is not a command to, you know, kill the entire mission field. It deals with the conquest of Canaan, and even that, having said that, if you read chapter 2, what happens to a Canaanite prostitute by the name of Rahab when she throws herself on the mercy of the Lord and his people? Do they kill her? No. No. The first thing that

Yahweh conquers in the land is the heart of a Canaanites prostitute. In fact, she's engrafted into Israel.

So my point is, brothers and sisters, read the book of Joshua in the larger context of what's going on in redemptive history. Don't lift the book out of context and then use it for whatever purposes you wish. In fact, this book teaches us a kind of holy war that's very instructive of the kind of God we serve, not only then but also now. God has delivered his people, the church, from Egyptian slavery 40 years before. God was with his people for 40 years listening to their grumbling, their whining and their complaining, but he did not leave them and he did not forsake them but he brings them now to the edge of the Promised Land.

Now Moses himself doesn't enter. You recall the story when God tells Moses, "You speak to the rock so that water might come from it." But he's angry and he strikes the rock. The water comes but God says, "Why didn't you believe me? And because you disobeyed my voice, you will see the Promised Land but you will not enter it." God takes his own commandments that seriously. Moses, if you will, dies right by the front door of the Promised Land.

And therefore the book of Joshua 1 is actually a kind of great transition. It's a great transition chapter, the beginning of a new book, a new period in God's redemptive plan of reconquering this world, but first things first. First things first. Moses is dead and so now Joshua must fill his sandals and lead Israel in this conquest. I want to minister God's word to you this evening from Joshua 1 under the theme "The Lord Prepares Joshua for Conquest Leadership." The Lord prepares Joshua for conquest leadership, and first of all, take note of the chain of leadership, or you might say the chain of command; secondly, the equipment for leadership; and then finally, the leadership that must be exercised without fear, the call for no fear.

First, then, the chain of command or the chain of leadership. The new leader is Joshua. Now actually that's a great name. If you've ever studied what the name of Joshua means, it means "the Lord wins; the Lord conquers; the Lord delivers; Yahweh wins." In fact, Joshua is simply an Old Testament Hebrew version of what we know in the New Testament as Jesus. In Matthew 1, Joseph has said, "You shall name him Jesus." Why? "Because he will deliver his people from their sins." Call him Jesus. Call him Joshua because Yahweh wins.

And therefore Israel is viewed within this story as a fighting force. It's considered a kind of army, and the Commander in Chief is Yahweh. Now any army has a chain of command. In the United States, our President, Joe Biden, is Commander in Chief. Underneath him are the Joint Chiefs of Staff and with them, underneath them are the leaders of the various branches of our armed forces: Army, Navy, Air Force, etc. And so you can see this also in this story because in verse 10 Joshua then speaks to the officers, "Get this people ready because in three days we're going to move." And then in verse 16, the leaders, the officers of Israel, speak back to him, "Whatever you command we will do, we will obey." So quite clearly there is a chain of command in the structure of Israel.

Now it's interesting later on in chapter 9, this chain of command will be violated because there the story is of the Gibeonites, Canaanites who disguise themselves as people who come from a long distance. "Notice how old our clothes are, our bread is moldy, we've come from a long ways away. Please make a treaty with us that we will be people in peace with one another." But the interesting thing is they were Canaanites but Joshua does not consult the Commander in Chief. He doesn't turn to Yahweh and say, "Yahweh, what shall we do here?" On his own he makes a treaty with the Gibeonites.

Now the church today also has a chain of command, it is, it does, Jesus Christ is the head of the church. No bishop. No archbishop. Jesus Christ is the head of the church but he rules his church by means of his word and Spirit, and according to the revelation of the New Testament, he has given the leadership of the church underneath Christ as the head office-bearers. As we say in the Belgic Confession, God's people shall be governed by that spiritual polity which he has revealed in his word, namely that there should be pastors and ministers, elders and deacons. And the nature of their office is not magisterial. Now if you remember your high school Latin, the word "mini" means "less," so the minister is the one who does the lesser things as the magistrate does the greater things, magnus magus. The only magistrate in the church is Christ and therefore the work of elders, pastors, deacons, is ministerial, that is, it is serving, it is teaching, it is ruling but not in an overbearing way, not in a selfish way, not in a cruel way. Office-bearers must care for us and then we, in turn, show them proper respect as befits their office. In fact, Hebrews 13:7 says, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." And then Hebrews 13:17 goes on to say, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you," Hebrews 13.

So quite clearly we can see already in Joshua 1 that there is a chain of leadership, there is a kind of chain of command, but, secondly, take note of the equipment for leadership that is revealed here. Now any one of you who are students know that when the Allied Forces were preparing Operation Overlord, the invasion of Nazi Europe on the beaches of Normandy, June 6, 1944, tremendous amount of planning had to go into that, right? Which beach shall we land at? How many soldiers will we need? How many boats and ships will be necessary? How many planes shall be used in this operation? Even what's the weather forecast? Meteorologists had to be used for the proper planning of that event. Because the Nazi's were not simply going to lay down their weapons and run, they certainly were not going to invite the Allied soldiers onto the beaches of northern France for a cup of tea, the Allies needed enough men and enough equipment to get the job done.

What does God tell Joshua? Is he going to have Joshua put his men through a kind of Gideon test? Do you remember that story told in the book of Judges? Thousands of troops from Israel, all parts of Israel come to join Gideon but God says, "You have way too many soldiers, and if people want to go home, let them go home." Well, thousands go home but there's still too many so they have the drinking water test, and then Gideon is

left with 300 men. That's all. What about Joshua? How many troops is he told to have? What kind of weapons are they going to have? When you read this chapter with that question in mind, then God's directions for the conquest of the land sound very very strange to us. In verses 7 and following, the Lord tells Joshua to be very careful to obey everything in Mosaic law, to turn neither to the right hand nor to the left. In other words, obedience, obedience to the revealed word of God. But there's more, verse 8, Joshua should speak this word; it has to be in his mouth. He is to meditate on it. He's to think deeply about it. He's to talk about it all the time day and night. Now this is Joshua's weapon, the word of God. This is the battle plan, meditate on God's word, talk about it, do it.

Do you think this is going to impress Canaanites with their powerful armies? How about the numbers, the numbers that Joshua will need in the conquest? Well, verses 6 to 8 mention Joshua, "You, Joshua, will cause this people to receive the land. Be strong and courageous for then you, Joshua, will have success." It sounds like the whole thing rests upon one man's shoulders, Joshua, the successor of Moses. So you get the picture? One man, Joshua, called by Yahweh, the Lord, to take the word of God in hand, embrace it, do it, then he will receive victory, then he will prosper, then he will have success on all fronts.

Now doesn't this sound like a joke? I'm reminded of what Joseph Stalin, the head of the Soviet Union from the 1920s until his death in 1953, he did something that his advisors said, "You know, Comrade Stalin, what you did really has angered the pope." To which Stalin reportedly said, "How many divisions does he have?" In other words, what would impress Joseph Stalin, troops, divisions, tanks, soldiers, guns, rifles. What is this man, Joshua, to do with this? "I am to face the enemy armed only with the Bible?"

Now brothers and sisters, before we just pass this off as, well, you know, this is strange, it really is not strange if you understand the dynamics of the kingdom of God also as we have that in the New Testament. It's really being revealed right here in Joshua 1, and if you read the plan here, it sounds a lot like what we sang from Psalm 1. The man is blessed who, on the one hand, doesn't side in any way, shape or form with the wicked but rather his delight is in, what? In the law of the Lord. And he meditates on it how often? Day and night, continually. He delights in it. He loves it. He meditates on it always. He's willing to do it because in all things he prospers. He's, well, the psalmist in Psalm 1 says he's like a tree, a tree that's planted next to really stable sources of water. The leaf doesn't wither and when it's time for fruit, there's always plenty of fruit. That's what the man is like who delights in the will of the Lord and the law of the Lord.

Now, brothers and sisters, if I may add an aside, some people read Psalm 1 and say, "Well, you know, I think we have a few members here in the Walker Church who fit that bill. They're really really godly people. They love the Bible. They meditate on it. They pray." Brothers and sisters, who here meditates on the law of God day and night? Day and night? Day and night? Always? Who delights in it always? Who here does it always? Psalm 1 is not describing your most ideal church member, though in abstract we could

say, well, wouldn't that be wonderful. You know who fulfills Psalm 1? Jesus Christ. The church has always understood in history that this Psalm 1 is ultimately fulfilled by Christ.

But I wonder, was the inspired psalmist when he wrote Psalm 1 thinking of what God tells Joshua in Joshua 1? What do you think? Did he have God's commission to Joshua in mind when he wrote Psalm 1? You know, Psalm 1 is a wisdom Psalm and wisdom Psalms often describe, you know, the two tracks in life: there's the track of the righteous, the way of the righteous, then there's the way of the wicked. God knows and he loves the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish. And thus Psalm 1 is kind of a wonderful entry into the cathedral of the Psalms. You begin your journey through 150 Psalms by knowing the blessed man loves God's word and the wicked will come to nothing.

And just as Joshua 1 is the first chapter of the whole book, it sets the stage for all that happens, will happen next. Thus, Joshua 1 introduces us to the preparation that the leader needs in order to have a successful campaign, conquering the Promised Land. Hard to believe, isn't it? Hard to believe that the first, the very first instruction focuses not on spears or swords, not on numbers of men, the very first instructions must be on Joshua's commitment to the word of the Lord.

And what happens if Joshua is successful? Well, then these people of God will take possession of the Promised Land and they will, then, enter into rest. This is what he describes for the 2 ½ tribes who will settle in the Transjordan, east side of the Jordan, as those men are armed and must join the other tribes in the conquest of the land itself. Look at verses 13 through 15. The 2 ½ tribes of the Transjordan region are to join in the move across the river conquering, and then once that conquest is accomplished, then those 2 ½ tribes, the men of valor, can go home and then they enter the rest.

And brothers and sisters, let me just take a few moments to talk about that word "rest." You shouldn't think of the Promised Land as a rest home, a retirement village for Israelites. That's not what that word means. The word "rest" there means "to be settled securely." To be settled securely, without enemies disturbing you. Settled security in the land of promise. As Psalm 144 describes it for us, our sons strong, our daughters like carved pillars, our flocks increasing, our fields bearing much fruit, and no enemy in sight. How happy are the people of whom this is true. How happy the people whose God is the Lord, Yahweh. Because, you know, we started the service with a call to worship from Psalm 95 but if you keep reading the Psalm to the very end, this is what it says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. or forty years I loathed that generation and said, 'They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.' Therefore I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter,'" what? "My rest." The Promised Land where God would set them up, an establishment so that they could live and rest and work and play and enjoy perfect shalom.

Now Joshua will lead them into that land but he's not able to give them lasting rest, and that's why the book of Hebrews says there is still a rest that awaits the people of God. Not a retirement village where we sit in rocking chairs and watch and sip lemonade. It's to be engaged in life that is free from burdens, free from sin, free from attack. It's to be settled in security. The church is warned and is told to listen to God's voice, listen to his voice because if we do not, if we harden our hearts, we will not enter his rest.

Finally, then, there is this call to lead with no fear. Did you notice that in this chapter? Again and again you come across this wording, "Be strong and courageous. Have no fear. Be strong." And so a great future really lies before Israel here in Joshua 1, and yet a strange kind of preparation of the land, but from the vantage point of where we are in the New Testament, it really begins to make sense for Joshua here is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. His name already suggests it, the name Jesus means "the Lord will save, the Lord will win, the Lord will deliver his people from their sins." And Jesus is our leader today in the current spiritual warfare against his and our own enemies. Jesus means "the Lord saves, the Lord wins, the Lord overcomes all enemies."

You know, Jesus, this chapter really looks forward to something that Jesus indicated clearly in the garden of Gethsemane and in his trial before Pontius Pilate. You remember in the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus is being arrested, Peter draws a sword and he swings at the servant of the high priest. Now that servant ducked but his ear got cut off because Peter was aiming for the neck, I'm almost sure. He didn't want to simply nick the ear but he was going to swing at the man to strike him down. But what does Jesus tell Peter? "Put it away. If you live by the sword, you die by the sword." Later on when he's on trial before Pontius Pilate, the crowd is saying, "This man says he's a king." Well, Pilate asks him, "Are you a king?" And, in essence, Jesus says, "Yes, I am a king, but my kingdom is not of this world otherwise my followers would fight." "So you are a king?" "Yes," but we don't fight with swords and spears and tanks. We don't use physical weapons, do we?

You know the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:10 and following that lists the kind of equipment that the Christians use today. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, is it, but our fight is against spiritual powers. You know, there's a saying, they use it in Chicago but I'm sure you've heard it here in Michigan as well: you don't bring a knife to a gunfight. You don't bring a knife to a gunfight because if you're only armed with a knife, you're outclassed. You do not use physical weapons in a spiritual conflict, and that's what the church is engaged in, in this world, isn't it?

So when Christians say, "We've got to pass this referendum or these candidates have to be elected and then the church can move forward," I'm all for good candidates, don't get me wrong, I'm all for good candidates but the church is not advanced on election days, it's advanced when it keeps proclaiming the word of God, living out the word of God, and pressing the claims of King Jesus spiritually. Paul says, "This is our equipment, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, readiness for the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God." The word of God.

And all of these are given to us in the gospel. Christ died on the cross to take away your sins, so that burden is lifted at Calvary. He conquered death for us and so death, that monster, has been defanged. He will not take us down. We are resurrection people. He's poured out his Spirit, that by that Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, the things of Christ can be communicated to you, worked in your hearts, worked in our lives. And then we have faith, faith in Christ, faith that sees Christ, saving faith, faith that dares to face our enemies. We lay hold of this truth even though we still battle against sin, that's true, we still battle with consciences that keep accusing us, nevertheless you and I, in Christ by grace through faith, have received the righteousness of Christ as our own, and therefore we read and we study and we think a lot about what God has said in his word.

Now that takes time but the results are thrilling. Challenging, sometimes they make us uncomfortable but the results are beautiful. We are ready to fight the spiritual battles come what may. We don't resort to tricks, gimmicks, human devices that manipulate people to do what we want without any heart commitment; our hearts, your hearts must be given over to Christ our Lord.

Brothers and sisters, as we conclude tonight, let me just challenge you with a few things. Can we submit to God's word with humility, seeking his face, reminding ourselves that it is not our wisdom or our strength or our cleverness that will win the day? Secondly, what confidence do you have that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only leader we have, but really the only leader that we need? Third, how are you personally and as a family arming yourself for the better knowledge of God's word? Fourth, Joshua is told to do what God says, what areas of life still need Christians working together to apply as best as we can biblical principles in family life? Business practices? Educational strategies? And so on and so forth. Finally, is Jesus really Immanuel for us? God is with us, but if he's with us as he said he would be until the close of the age, then there's no need for us to be afraid because God himself is with us.

Brothers and sisters, Joshua 1 is a glorious introduction to what God is doing through his chosen servant, and today that chosen servant is his own blessed Son the Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus said before he went to the cross, he said this to his disciples and thus to his church, "In this world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." This is good news. Amen.

Let us pray.

*Gracious God our Father, how often our faith is overwhelmed by the power of the forces that are arrayed against your church. We know that there are very powerful forces in our society that have no love for Christ or for your word, and sometimes we can be intimidated by them. And gracious God, who is greater, the Canaanites or your own Son the Lord Jesus Christ? All the leaders of other religions are dead but Christ, our head, the only head of the church, is alive forevermore and so, Father, keep us from fear, keep us steady, keep us in your word but keep us also willing and ready and able to apply that word graciously, gently, but firmly in this world today and thus show to the world that*



*your word does give light and life where it is lived out and practiced. Father, we have so often been faithless and we have fallen short. Forgive us. Renew our faith in you. Renew our desire to know your word and to do it even more faithfully.*