

CONQUEST!

(Lessons From the Book of Joshua)

Perhaps too many of us are like the fellow who said, *“Like Alexander the Great and Caesar, I’m out to conquer the world. But first I have to stop at Wal-Mart and pick up some supplies.”*

Today I want to talk to you about the theme of **“Conquest!”**

And the Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had solemnly promised their ancestors. None of their enemies could stand against them, for the Lord helped them conquer all their enemies. JOSHUA 21:44 NLT

They did not conquer the land with their swords; it was not their own strong arm that gave them victory. It was your right hand and strong arm and the blinding light from your face that helped them, for you loved them. PSALM 44:3 NLT

One-Sentence Summary: God fulfilled His promises to Israel to give them a land through the conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua.

The Conquest of Canaan is one of the most amazing stories in the Old Testament. Joshua had succeeded Moses as the new leader of Israel. The name Joshua appears about 200 times in the Bible. It means, *“Jehovah saves.”* (Jesus is a transliteration of Joshua. He is the Savior of the world, not just Israel.) Jehovah God would help Joshua and all Israel conquer the Promised Land of Canaan. They did not conquer the land by themselves; it was the mighty right hand of God that gave them victory!

This is a vital lesson we must learn in life. There is much to overcome and conquer. Fear, feelings of inferiority and inadequacy, hopelessness, discouragement, disillusionment, and despair. We all need God in our lives to help us gain the victory. ***“His power can make you what you ought to be.”*** The Greek word for conquer is *nikao* (from which we get Nike) and means, “to prevail, to gain the victory.” Just do it. . . but do it in Jesus’ name. You can be a conqueror in Jesus’ name.

There are at least three permanent and prominent faith lessons we can learn from the book of Joshua.

I. BELIEVE THE PROMISES

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.” JOSHUA 1:1-5 NIV

There may be as many as 8,000 promises in the Word of God. Here we see four wonderful promises to Joshua and Israel.

1. I will give you every place where you set your foot.
2. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon [south to north], and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea [east to west].

3. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life.
4. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you.

All Israel had to do was keep putting one foot in front of the other. Believe the promise and take the first step. The longest journey begins with the first step. Joshua sent two spies to Jericho and the rest is history. A two-sentence summary is found in the Faith Chapter of the Bible.

By faith the walls of Jericho toppled after the people had circled them for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab welcomed the Hebrew spies into her home so that she did not perish with the unbelievers. Hebrews 11:30, 31 NLT

From Jericho to Meggido (and 35 cities in between) they boldly conquered the land of Canaan. (I wonder what key cities in America today need to be conquered? Certainly Washington, D.C. Hollywood. Los Angeles. San Francisco. New York. Joplin!) They suffered only one setback (at the city of Ai, because one man, Achan, got greedy), but for the greater part of the story they marched to victory because they believed the promises of God.

*“Standing on the promises that cannot fail;
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,
Standing on the promises of God” (R. Kelso Carter)*

“So what should we say about all of this? If God is on our side, then tell me: whom should we fear?” ROMANS 8:31, THE VOICE

Do you believe the promise that God is on your side? Do you believe that He will give you every place you set foot? Do you believe that your territory will expand from the south to the north and from the east to the west? Do you believe that no one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life? Do you believe that God will be with you, and that He will never leave you nor forsake you?

Believe the promises of God and take the first step in faith! God told Israel to cross the Jordan River (1:2) and they took those first steps of faith – crossing the Jordan at flood stage – on dry land, just as they had done at the Red Sea (Chapter 3).

2. FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS

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 1:6-9 NIV

I can’t help but notice that three times God tells Joshua and Israel to **“be strong and very courageous.”** We are living in times when we also need to be strong and very courageous. The Bible says, **“Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might”** EPHESIANS 6:10, NKJV. Our strength comes from the Lord. **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”** PHILIPPIANS 4:13, NKJV.

And then there is courage. Most of us are like the cowardly lion in the Wizard of Oz. We need more courage! Courage is acting in the face of fear. On one occasion, Jesus told His disciples, **“Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.”**

Peter and John learned this lesson well. **“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus”** ACTS 4:13, NIV

Someone has said: **IT TAKES COURAGE:**

- To refrain from gossip when others about you delight in it.
- To stand up for an absent person who is being abused.
- To live honestly within your means and not dishonestly on the means of others.
- To be a real man, a true woman, by holding fast to your Christian ideals when it causes you to be looked upon as strange and peculiar.
- To be talked about and yet remain silent when a word would justify you in the eyes of others, but which you cannot speak without injury to another.
- To refuse to do a thing which is wrong, though others do it.
- To dress according to your income and to deny yourself what you cannot afford to buy.
- To live always according to your convictions.

Victor Knowles' daughter Emily has a poster on son's Jack's bulletin board that he sees every day: *“Wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it and right is right even if no one is doing it.”* This takes courage, even in third grade!

Billy Graham said, *“Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened.”*

We need to follow the directions. It can be deadly if we do not. ABC News reported the following on July 17, 1999.

John F. Kennedy Jr. turned down an offer by one of his flying instructors to accompany him the night of his fatal flight to Martha's Vineyard, saying he *“wanted to do it alone,”* federal investigators say.

In its final report on the crash, the National Transportation Safety Board said the instructor who offered to go with him was not “comfortable” with having Kennedy alone at the controls that evening, given the route and the weather conditions.

Kennedy's single-engine Piper Saratoga crashed as he was flying with his wife, Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, and her sister, Lauren Bessette, from Fairfield, N.J., just outside New York City, to Martha's Vineyard on July 16, 1999. All three died.

Disorientation Caused Crash The NTSB concluded the probable cause of JFK Jr.'s fatal plane crash was “failure to maintain control of the airplane” due to spatial disorientation of the pilot. Haze and the darkness of the night were also cited as factors. Nothing was found to be wrong with Kennedy's plane.

The Bible says, **“Lord, I know that people's lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps”** (Jeremiah 10:23). When we *“want to do it alone”* or *“go our own way,”* disaster often follows.

“Always follow directions.” Let’s look at some of the directions/instructions that God gave to Joshua and Israel.

1. Be careful to obey all the law My servant Moses gave you.
2. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left.
3. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips.
4. Meditate on it day and night.
5. Be careful to do everything written in it.

And I love the people’s rapid response to these divine directions!

They answered Joshua, **“We will do whatever you command us, and we will go wherever you send us”** JOSHUA 1:16, NLT

This reminds me of the ready response of the hearers on the Day of Pentecost: **“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them”** ACTS 2:41, NKJV

If you want to succeed in life, follow the directions. The Word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light for our path. Obey from the heart the Word of God. He knows what is best for you. Don’t swerve from the truth, either to the right or to the left. Margaret Thatcher once said at a critical point in history, **“This is no time to go wobbly!”** Stay on the highway of holiness that leads to heaven. Constantly affirm the truth of God’s Word (keep it always on your lips). The early Christians went everywhere preaching the Word. Meditate on it day and night (keep it always in your heart). And be very careful to do everything written in the Word of God. Be a doer of the Word, not a hearer only. This is what Jesus meant when He said, **“Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”** MATTHEW 28:20, NIV

3. MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES

Notice how he once again invokes those familiar words: **Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left.**

I have always liked to read the Farewell Addresses of great leaders like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and General Douglas MacArthur. Because last Monday was Veteran’s Day, I want to share his closing lines.

I am closing my 52 years of military service. When I joined the Army, even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfillment of all of my boyish hopes and dreams. The world has turned over many times since I took the oath on the plain at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have long since vanished, but I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barrack ballads of that day which proclaimed most proudly that “old soldiers never die; they just fade away.”

And like the old soldier of that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away, an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty.

Good Bye.

Israel was faced with many choices. To obey or turn away from the Word of God. To associate or not with enemy nations. To turn to idols or hold fast to God. To ally themselves with pagans through intermarriage or not. And we face some of the same choices today. Will I believe the Book or profess to be wiser than God? Will I put other gods (idols) before the one, true God? Who will I marry? A believer or an unbeliever? The late A. Word used to say, *“If you marry a child of the devil, don’t be surprised when you have trouble with your father-in-law.”*

Joshua was an “old soldier” too. His Farewell Address is also a classic.

In the final chapter, Joshua picks up the story at the crossing of the Jordan and then concludes his Farewell Address with these words: The essence of this conclusion is captured in verse 15:

“If you decide that it’s a bad thing to worship God, then choose a god you’d rather serve—and do it today. Choose one of the gods your ancestors worshiped from the country beyond The River, or one of the gods of the Amorites, on whose land you’re now living. As for me and my family, we’ll worship God.” (THE MESSAGE)

May God give us the strength and courage to reply as they did: **WE WILL SERVE THE LORD!**

Remember: **“His power can make you what you ought to be!”**

“...in all these things we are MORE THAN CONQUERORS through him who loved us” ROMANS 8:37