

Josh 1
Tim Anderson 11/10/20

Today we begin a new sermon series on the book of Joshua.
Joshua is one of those books
that features in the stories in children's Bibles.
But lots of adults skip over reading what it says to us.
So we're going remedy that.

Where does Joshua fit into the story of the Bible?
The book of Exodus starts with the people of Israel in slavery in Egypt.
God rescues them from slavery to take them to the Promised Land,
a land he had sworn to give
to the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
It's 11 days walk from Egypt to Canaan.
But when Israel had walked to the border of Canaan,
they sent spies into the land.
12 spies.
Ten of them told the people
that the Canaanites were too strong and numerous.
So the Israelites gave in to fear.
They refused to go in
and take over the land that God had promised to give them.
God was angry at their lack of faith.
He had made a promise.
But they were not willing to take him at his word.
So God decided that the whole generation
who had refused to enter the land must die off
before he would fulfil his promise.
And Israel spent 40 long years in the wilderness,
waiting for that generation to die off.
There were however two spies who have a dissenting report.
Their names were Joshua and Caleb.
Joshua and Caleb told the nation that they should trust God
and go in and take over the land.

They carried a bunch of grapes from the land.
It was such a large bunch of grapes,
they had to mount it on a pole between the two of them
in order to be able to carry it.

They said, "This is what the produce of the land is like."

Num 14:7 "The land we passed through and explored
is exceedingly good.

If the Lord is pleased with us,
he will lead us into that land,
a land flowing with milk and honey,
and will give it to us."

Well the people of Israel might not have listened to Joshua and Caleb.
But God did.

Their whole generation died off.

But Joshua and Caleb survived.

And 40 years later,

Joshua was given the task of leading the Israelites
into the Promised Land and Caleb was his second in command.

And that is where the book of Joshua begins.

It's an upbeat book

because this is God's people being led by God into victory.

And as we turn to Joshua chapter 1,

I want to highlight three lessons for the people of Israel
and four lessons for us.

So three lessons for the people of Israel.

How do you know that God is with you?

People make all kinds of claims about God being with them.

"I'm feeling really good and positive today.

God must be with me."

"I got three green lights in a row,

God must be with me."

Well if you can get three green lights in a row
when you are only allowed to drive 5 km.

"I invited a girl on a date and she said yes,
 God must be with me."
 People make all kinds of claims,
 but what does Joshua 1 say is evidence that God is with you?

Well first of all,
 notice that God certainly does promise to be with Joshua.
 1:9 "Do not be afraid,
 do not be discouraged,
 for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

God has promised to be with Joshua.

But what are the signs that he's with him.

How can they know when they follow him,
 that this is really God's man they are following?

Well there are three signs in this chapter.

And God has grouped them into the very memorable alliteration:
 Leader, Land and Law.

1:1 "After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord,
 the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' aide:"

Who was Moses?

Moses was the servant of the Lord.

Albeit at times a reluctant servant.

He wanted his brother Aaron to speak to Pharaoh on his behalf.

But he was the servant of the Lord nonetheless.

He is the greatest of all the human beings to walk on the earth
 except Jesus.

God selected him.

God gave him the task of leading his people
 (whether he wanted it or not).

And so you know

if you are following a leader personally selected by God,
 then God is with you.

Well Joshua was Moses' appointed successor.

Moses had laid his hands on Joshua before Moses died.

Here is Joshua 1, God speaks directly to Joshua.

1:2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now then ..."

God has clearly chosen Joshua to follow on as leader after Moses.

And so God's people can know that if they follow Joshua, they are not following some self appointed strong man.

Someone who rules because others are fearful

about what might happen to them if they don't support him.

Think Kim Jong Un.

They are not following someone who obtained the leadership role because he had a charismatic personality

and was able to persuade the people that he ought to lead them.

Think a democratically elected leader.

They are not following someone who managed to convince others that his ideas about the future

paint a compelling vision of what is possible,

and that under his leadership the future looks bright.

Think a CEO of a company.

No. This is someone who is directly chosen by God.

And if you follow someone directly chosen by God, then God is with you.

So long as that person keeps obeying God.

But that's a caveat for when we look at King Saul, not Joshua.

How does the Israelite know that they are following God's man?

Number one, He's God's appointed leader.

Number 2, He's leading them into God's Promised Land.

1:3-4 "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."

Why does God say 'as I promised Moses'?

Well it's a sign to Joshua that he really is a true successor to Moses.

Every person in Christian ministry goes through periods of doubt.

Not necessarily doubting their faith,

but doubting whether they really have what it takes
to do the job God has given them to do.

That doubt is only magnified if you land a job
where you are following a giant.

I can't imagine what it would be like
to become minister of St Jude's in Carlton
straight after Peter Adam had spent 20 years there.

Or even worse,
being the Rector of All Souls Langham Place straight after John Stott.
It wouldn't matter how hard you tried,
you would never feel like you measured up.

How much more difficult to be leader of Israel
straight after Moses had led the nation for 40 years.

And so God reassures Joshua.

It's not about you, mate.

I am God.

The promises I made to Moses belong to you now.

But in fact, those promises were not originally made to Moses at all.

Hundreds of years before Moses,

God had made those promises to Abraham.

They were restated to Isaac and Jacob.

They are not the property of any one individual.

They belong to the descendents of Abraham.

How does an Israelite know that God is with them?

Are they living in line with God's big promises?

God has promised them the land.

If they are going in to take hold of what God has promised,
then God is with them.

How does an Israelite know that God is with them?

The three Ls.

Leader, land and law.

1:7 "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."
How can an Israelite know that God is with them?
He has given them his law.
The Law often feels burdensome to us.
Who likes someone else telling them they have to wear a mask?
There are no cases on the Mornington Peninsula.
Why do I have to wear a mask?
Because it's the law.
Law feels like something that weighs me down.
But God's Law was not like that for the Israelite.
All the other nations were scratching around,
looking for ways to please their gods.
Many of the Canaanite nations even sacrificed their children
in the vain attempt to appease Molech or Chemosh
or some other detestable spirit.
But Israel's God didn't leave his people
scratching around looking for ways to please him.
Instead he revealed himself to them.
If they followed his ways,
what does it say they would be?
Prosperous and successful.
It sounds like an ancient televangelist.
"Here's your guide to prosperity and success.
Just follow God's holy Law as given to Moses."
And even though Israel certainly struggled to keep God's Law,
they certainly recognised it as a good law.
This was the Law that enabled their society to function with justice.
This was the Law that stopped conflicts escalating.
That terrible sounding 'eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth,
which sounds so retributive to modern ears,
was actually a way of stopping conflicts escalating.

You scratch my car,
then I'll slash your tyres,
the you smash my windscreen,
then I'll burn your house down.
That's how conflicts tended to go.
But this was a way of saying,
"No. If I do some damage to you,
then you take it to the magistrate.
The magistrate will allow you to do an equal amount of damage to me.
Then we can both forget about it and move on.
There is no need for things to escalate."
It's not the turn the other cheek ethic of Jesus.
But it allowed society to function well.
It allowed Israel to become successful and prosperous.
And isn't it interesting,
that the very thing that false teachers of the prosperity gospel
take as a measure that God is with them,
is actually the outcome keeping God's Law.
The false teachers say, I'm successful and prosperous,
God must be with me.
That's exactly upside down.
God says to Joshua,
"If you keep my Law,
I will be with you.
Then you will be successful and prosperous."
Christian, you worry about seeking first the kingdom of God,
and then all the other things will be added to you as well.
If not in this life, then in the new heavens and the new earth.
Don't get your focus on the wrong stuff.

So that was three ways that the Israelite could tell that God is with them.
Leader - they have God's appointed leader.
Land - they are going into the land
that God had promised them for hundreds of years.
Law - they have a way of knowing that they are pleasing God.

He's set out for them how to live in his ways,
and it's a good Law.

Now some lessons about faith for the Christian.

What does this passage tell us about faith.

Firstly and this ought to go without saying,
but as my mate James from the Langwarrin church says,
"If it goes without saying,
it needs to be said."

Faith is believing in God,
not believing in yourself.
Faith is believing in God,
not believing in yourself.

Now popular psychology tells you that you need to believe in yourself.
It's the power of positive thinking.

If you just believe in yourself,
you can do anything.

How many lame Hollywood movies have been written on that trope?
But actually a cursory look at the world tells you this:
if you believe strongly enough in yourself,
you become a narcissist.

You look at people in public life
who have the strongest belief in themselves,
and they can't do anything they choose.

They have no control whether they catch the virus or not.

They can't control the stock market or the weather.

The only result of their incredible self belief
is that they lose the ability to care about other people.

It's all about them.

But what does this passage tell us that faith is?

God made promises to Joshua and Joshua had to believe God.

I've chosen you to be Moses' successor, believe me.

I will take you into the land

that I've been promising my people for hundreds of years.

All the other leaders heard about it,

you are actually going to feel the ground beneath your feet- believe me!
 If you follow my law, I will make you prosperous and successful -
 believe me!

Faith is believing God.

Second thing this passage tells us,
 is that faith is believing God's big promises.

Lots of people say that they are believing God for all manner of things.

"I'm believing God for an end to the lockdown next week."

Well that would be really nice.

But there's one problem.

God hasn't promised you an end to the lockdown next week.

You can't make up your own promise,

and then say I'm believing God for the promise that I've made up.

You actually have to believe God for the promises that he has made.

What has God promised you?

That if you put your trust in the Lord Jesus,
 you sins will be forgiven.

That if you follow Jesus,

he will take you to spend eternity in the new creation.

That if you receive the Holy Spirit into your heart,

he will grow his fruit inside of you -

make you more patient, joyous, loving and all the rest.

That when you face persecution for your faith,

he will give you the strength to overcome opposition

and remain steadfast in trusting him till the end of your life.

Those are the promises of God.

And faith is believing the things God has actually promised.

Not believing the things you make up

and attach God's name to them is if that made them his idea.

You know, Joshua didn't look out over the Promised Land
 and say to himself,

"Hey, That's a pretty impressive bit of real estate.

I'm believing God

that he's going to give that to us as our ancestral land."

No. He was told by God which bit of land God was going to give him before he ever set eyes on it.

And it was the same bit of land that God had promised his people for hundreds of years.

The third thing this passage tells us about faith.

Faith is about how you act on what you believe.

It's not about how you feel about what you believe.

Did God say to Joshua,

"Hey Josh, I'm thinking about giving you that parcel of land across the Jordan River.

So what I want you to do is focus your mind on that land.

And when you think you are 100% certain

that I'm going to give it to you,

then I will attach my little certainty meter.

And if you get a high enough certainty reading,

then I will give you land.

But if I can detect some wavering in your psychological state, hey I'm sorry, you'll miss out."

You know, I can't see that in the passage.

That's not what it says.

What does it say?

1:11 "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."

Cross the River!

How do you know if Israel has faith?

If they cross the river.

Does it matter if they feel some butterflies in their tummy while they are walking across the river?

Nope.

That's not a problem.

Are they going to be given the land if they don't cross the river?

Nope.

Their fathers wandered for 40 years in the wilderness
and they didn't get a sniff of the land.

They wouldn't cross the river.

Faith is about how you act on what you believe.

Sometimes people say,

"I will wait until my faith is stronger,
and then I will act on it."

Hogwash.

The only way your faith gets stronger is if you put it into practice.

You'd look at me a bit strangely if I said to you,

"I'm going to wait until my muscles get stronger,
and then I'm going to do some PE with Joe."

Hogwash.

Do some PE with Joe,

then your muscles will get stronger.

You have to put your faith into practice by acting on it
and then your faith will grow.

In summary then.

How do the people of Israel know that God is with them?

They have the leader God has appointed.

They are going into the land God has promised.

They are following the law God has given.

What can we as Christians learn from this passage?

Faith is believing in God not believing in ourselves.

Faith is believing in what God has promised

not believing whatever fairy tales we made up ourselves.

Faith is about how you act on what you believe,

not how you feel about things.