

Marching as to War: Captain Joshua! Attenshun!

Joshua 1:10-18

By [Dr. J. Ligon Dunca](#)

Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, to possess it.'" And to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God gives you rest, and will give you this land.' Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle shall remain in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but you shall cross before your brothers in battle array, all your valiant warriors, and shall help them, until the LORD gives your brothers rest, as He gives you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to your own land, and possess that which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you, beyond the Jordan, toward the sunrise." And they answered Joshua, saying, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. 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. Anyone who rebels against your command and does not obey your words in all that you command him, shall be put to death; only be strong and courageous."

Amen, may God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant words. Now let's pray together.

Our Father we bow in Your presence once again. This is Your word; You caused it to be written by Your finger. Holy men of old wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Be our teacher, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Voltaire, the French enlightenment philosopher—a humanist, whose views on self sufficiency captured the minds of the educated classes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of Europe (his most favorite work, of course, was *Candid*)-said that within a hundred years of his death, Christianity would be swept out of existence and pass into history.

Now many of you are saying, "Who is Voltaire?" Well you know fifty years after

Voltaire's death the Geneva Bible society used his press and house in the production of Bibles. I don't know about you but I find that deeply encouraging. The point being that God's purposes can never be thwarted. He builds His church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it. Moses is dead, but the plan of God and the purposes of God as regards redemption of His people abide true still. God will do that which he has promised. As John Wesley put it, "God's varies His workmen, but His work goes on."

Now I have deliberately divided the chapter this way because I want to us to capture something of what kind of man Joshua was. I want us to see something of the character of Joshua as a leader of men and women so that in the ensuing study of the book of Joshua we might have a better grasp of the kind of man that God raises up for such a task as this. He was of course Moses' first officer, his commander-in-chief of this rag-tag army that would do this enormous task of conquering and possessing the land of Canaan. It was a huge task. Don't under estimate the enormity of the task that now lies before them.

I don't know about you, but the hardest thing is to start. Of any task of any program of any motivation, the hardest thing is to start. I was reading this week of the days when horses pulled four wheeled wagons in the shunting yards, the railway yards of nineteenth century England. It took the strength of six horses to do that which only one horse needed in order to maintain the momentum. It needed six horses to start, but it only needed one to continue the movement on those railway trucks.

How do you begin a great task like this? Chapter 4 in verse 13 says that there were forty thousand men that would eventually cross over. The army, if you like. The army that eventually would cross over the Jordan and into the promised land would be around forty thousand men. Back in Numbers 26, in the second census that was taken after the men that were over twenty had died because of the plague, God's curse that befell the children of God in the period of the wilderness, they are numbered as over 600,000. There would be need for some men to stay behind to take care of the families, the mothers, the children, the livestock which was still left on the east of the river Jordan, but forty thousand men is still a significant number. Forty thousand would cross over and form the battle array. Of course it would be the younger men that would do that, it would be the fittest man that would do that.

During the Revolutionary War there was something in the region 200,000 men enlisted in the army. In the Civil War it was something in the region of 3,800,000. I think there were something like 2,800,000 in the union army and something just over one million in the confederate army. In World War II, there were 16,000,000 enlisted. This is 40,000, but it's still a significant number.

How did Joshua do it? How did Joshua lead these people, and leave these men in particular, into the land of Canaan. There is no secret here, because in the

book of Joshua we have the memoirs, the recorded narratives of the war story. I want this evening to try and pick out some of the highlights of that. I want to mention four things that arise out of this passage that tell us something about the character of Joshua as a leader.

I. Joshua is committed to the principle of partnership.

The first thing that I want us to see is that Joshua is committed to the principle of partnership. He's committed to the principle of partnership. We need to uncover some history in order to understand what it is that Joshua is saying to these two and one half tribes. The Reubenites and the Gadites had very large herds and flocks and they had asked Moses, as we heard just a few minutes ago, they had asked Moses is they could stay in that territory, that region of land to the east of the Jordan. Not in Canaan proper, but where their flocks and herds had already begun to settle down where there was good grazing and whatever. For some reason that isn't all together clear half of the tribe of Manasseh also wanted to stay there. Now, eventually half the tribe of Manasseh would be to the east of the River Jordan and slightly to the north and the rest of the tribe of Manasseh would be in Canaan proper and slightly to the south. That's how they would eventually end up. Moses tells them, "Yes, you may do that, you may stay there," and now Joshua is reminding them of that promise that Moses had made. You may stay east of the River Jordan so long as the men, the fighting men joined with all of the rest and indeed go in first fully armed for battle. You to must do this work for God.

What is the point of all of this? It looks like I have a bad text and I'm looking for something to say. There is something here of considerable significance. God doesn't want anyone to miss the blessing that He has promised. That's how a nice person would put it. Everyone has to get involved in the work of the kingdom of God. There are to be no hitchhikers. There are to be no loafers in the kingdom of God.

Actually what we have here is an Old Testament expression of what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 4. The body of Jesus Christ is built up of individual parts that are committed to the well being of the entire body. When all of the individual parts are doing their work properly the body is in fit condition. Paul works that out in a very graphic and detailed way in Ephesians 4. We all have gifts, we all have duties to do for the work of the kingdom of God and when everybody is doing what God wants them to do, the body is in good shape. That is what Paul is saying in Ephesians 4. It seems to be the principle upon which Joshua is now engaging in the leadership of the people of God.

That's challenging, isn't it? If I am not whole-heartedly committed to the work of God, not only may I miss the blessing, but I may also be the instrument that causes some others of God's children to miss the blessing. Now I want you to

think about that very deeply. Your inactivity, your refusal to use the gift that God has given you for the advantage and prosperity for the kingdom of God not only may rob you of blessing, but it also may rob the rest of the body of Christ of the blessing which God desires to bestow upon it. That's the principle. It's a staggering principle. What Jesus is saying to His church through this narrative seems to be that He wants the commitment of every single individual in the progress of the kingdom of God. That's why where you miss and absent yourselves from the means of grace you are doing damage not just to your own soul, but actually you're doing damage to the rest of the body of Christ. That's how a mean spirited person would say it. Isn't that a staggering principle? Here is Joshua, a leader, a commanding officer and he's saying to the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh, you are never going to dwell in this land in which we are now going to fight and occupy and possess, but I want you to be a part of the blessing which has come to the rest of the body of Christ. The fact that the Reubenites and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh were prepared to do that shows their servant-like spirit, doesn't it?

Joshua is committed as a leader to the principle of partnership, it's all about partnership. That's Joshua's strategy. There is no unity, there is no cohesion, unless everybody is singing from the same page. It's important that everyone is singing from the same page. Well, that's a principle that applies to the church of Jesus Christ and to the kingdom of God. Every single individual, no matter who you are, if you belong to Jesus, you have a responsibility to the body of Christ. That's the first thing.

II. The second thing is that Joshua is committed to the principle of planning.

You get the sense from these words that Joshua is in control. That he knows what he's doing. There is a plan of operation. He thought it through. There is a very definite strategy. They will enter the land, they will go to the center of Canaan and then some of them will go north and some of them will go south. It was a wonderful plan for occupying the land of Canaan and possessing it. He sends word through his officers to go through all of the camp and tell them that in three days this plan would begin. Now, these officers may be those whom Moses had appointed as leaders that we heard about very recently in Exodus 18. But look at Joshua 1:14. We read that they were to cross over, these Gadites and the Reubenites and the half tribe of Manasseh, and presumably along with all of the other men, they would form in battle array as valiant warriors for the kingdom of God.

Now I was reading a book this week that had in it, pictures. Pictures of the kind of weapons that these farmers, these wilderness wanderers might have had. I have to tell you, it was pitiful. They virtually had no weapons. They might have brought some things from Egypt 40 years before. They might have done that. Scripture

doesn't actually record that. They certainly didn't have any means of producing weapons when they were in the wilderness. They may have picked some up along the way, but whatever they had it was pitiful. All the more for Joshua to have a plan and a strategy, to exercise his leadership in such a way that he was conveying that he knew what he was doing.

I had a deacon in the church I served in Belfast, who had served in the Second World War on the fields of North Africa, under the authority of Field Marshal Montgomery, or Monty as they called him. Monty, Field Marshal Montgomery, had an ego the size of Mount Everest. Eisenhower didn't like him, nor did anyone else, but he had a plan, he had a plan, he had a strategy. That's important if you're going to call upon men to lay down their lives on behalf of a principle. It's principles like these, I suppose, that account for some of the great campaigns of history, under Alexander the Great or Cromwell, or Napoleon Bonaparte, or Patton, or Winston Churchill, or whoever it may be.

No, Joshua doesn't give us the details here. That's part of the wisdom. Some things in military strategy are best kept secret so as to maintain the element of surprise, but he's setting out a goal isn't he? He's setting out a goal. He's giving the big picture and the big picture as he says, on several occasions and for example in verse 11, the big picture is, "in order to possess the land." That's the goal. That's the goal.

III. Joshua is committed to motivation.

There is a third thing I want us to see here in the leadership of Joshua. Not only is he committed to the principle to partnership, and not only is he committed to the principle to planning, but also he's committed in the third place to motivation. It comes about in the discussion that we hear with these two and one half tribes. Twice Joshua reminds them of the reason why it is that they are about to embark on the campaign of their lives. In verse 13, and it's repeated again in verse 15, Joshua reminds them that the motivation, the motivation for embarking on this campaign is in order that they might secure rest. Look at verse 13, "the Lord your God gives you rest."

Now, that's a pretty significant term. It's probably more significant than you imagine. It is in Scripture because it has immense consequences as the Scriptures now grow and develop. For 40 years they have had no rest. They have been wandering. They have been going hither and yon in the wilderness, but they have never had rest. They were nothing more than a large group of spiritual vagrants, you know, the kind of people you want to move on and sleep at somebody else's backdoor.

As the Bible takes shape and grows and develops, the book of Hebrews for example, in chapters 3 and 4 make this issue of rest the key word that unlocks

the meaning of the book of Joshua, in the understanding indeed of the entire plan of God's redemptive purposes. Because what God is essentially about is obtaining a rest for the people of God. The writer of Hebrew cites the 95th Psalm, which says that David would not have mentioned a rest that is still to come if that rest had already been obtained. So, entering Canaan to obtain that rest was only a foretaste, it was only a picture of the rest that is still to come, and the New Testament says we are just like these people wandering about in the wilderness longing to enter into our rest. Those who have died in Jesus have entered into their rest and their works do follow them, Scripture says.

The Bible says that the Lord's Day, this day, this first day of the week upon which we commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, this day is a day of rest and gladness. This day, this recurring pattern of six days and one, or one day now and six, that every time the Sunday comes around, every time the Lord's Day comes around, it's a reminder, it's a pattern. It tells us that we have a rest which is yet to come, the rest of Heaven, the rest of glory, the rest of seeing the beauty of Jesus' face in all of it's glory. The rest when every tear will be wiped away, the rest when all will be joy and celebration, when trials and tribulations will be no more. Yes, that's what Scripture does with that principle.

You may say, "Where is all of that in Joshua chapter 1?" It's not there, but the rest of Scripture says that's the principle that's being worked out. Joshua is committed to the principle of motivating the people of God in order that they might get their rest.

Now motivation of course is very important. I received for Christmas a very large book of the speeches of Winston Churchill. I've been dipping into it every now and then. I've been dipping into it late at night when I should be going to sleep and they have been keeping me away because they are so powerful. His first speech as prime minister during World War II when France was falling and British power was at its lowest ebb, and capitulation was staring Europe and Britain in the face. These were Churchill's words,

I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.... What is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory—victory at all costs, victory in spite of terror, victory however long and hard the road may be... [And later, when invasion seemed certain:] We shall; defend our island, whatever the cost may be; we shall fight them on the beaches, we shall fight them on the landing grounds, we shall fight them in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight them in the hills; we shall never surrender...

It's probably one of the most moving speeches ever given. You can buy it on a tape or on a CD and you can play it. It is very powerful and with Churchill's voice it's even more motivating, but that's the principle. That's what Joshua is doing. He's motivating the people in order that they might obtain the rest that God has promised.

IV. Joshua is committed to God.

Now there is a fourth thing and very quickly. He's committed to partnership, he's committed to planning, he's committed to motivation, but he's committed in the fourth place to God. I don't know any other way of saying it. It comes in what the Reubenites and the Gadites are saying to Joshua. They swear allegiance to him in this blood-curdling oath that they give, that even if there is a hint of treason, that person must be put to death. They are giving themselves entirely without reservation to this great cause.

Notice what they say in verse 17, "may the Lord, your God be with you as He was with Moses." Though it's a prayer on their behalf, it helps me to see something of the strength of Joshua's character as a leader, because what is it that motivates? What distinguished Joshua from motivational speakers? Maybe you're been to some of these things. I've never been to them but I have seen some of their videos. You know the kind of things that say, "motivation is our focus, success is our passion." Now what distinguished Joshua from someone like that? It's because his entire emphasis is not upon himself and it's not even upon the goal, it is upon the Lord Himself. Verse 11, "the Lord your God is giving you this land." He repeats it again in verse 13, he repeats it again in verse 15. Take a little peek at Joshua chapter 3 and verse 5, "Joshua said to the people, 'consecrate yourselves for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.'" Joshua is full of God. That's what makes him a great leader. He is full of God. His every word is about God, His motivation is the glory of God.

What makes great Deacons? What makes great Elders? We are going to have to think about that this year. What makes a great Elder? Someone who is full of God. Someone who is consumed by the glory of God. "If you can keep your head while all around you are losing theirs and blaming it on you, you will be a man my son," said Kipling. Joshua is such a man, who keeps his head, and keeps his head focused upon the Lord. Did you notice the last thing that these men say to Joshua? They say to him, the very last words of chapter one, "be strong and courageous." Now, they have just heard God saying those very words to Joshua. I think, I suspect the reasons they are now echoing it is by way of a reminder that the strength and the courage that Joshua needs is a strength and courage that comes when we are consumed by almighty God. May God raise up in this congregation leaders of that caliber. May God bless His word to us. Let's pray together.

Our Father as we study Your word, our hearts are often moved and our spirits are often moved, but we pray this evening that that movement might be such that would draw us to rest entirely upon You. To see You as our chief glory and aim. Our Father, we pray for Your blessing and benediction upon us just now and ask that Your word might be hidden deep within our hearts for Jesus sake. Amen.

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