

Pressing On

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Church. It's very good to be able to be here and to share God's Word with you this morning. I'm very thankful to Pastor Brian to give me this opportunity again to preach God's Word.

And as mentioned by Pastor Brian, I'm supposed to share a little bit about our English Youth Ministry. So I'm the current youth deacon for the EYM, the English Youth Ministry here in this church.

In EYM, we want to help our youth demographic in this church to equip them with understanding the Bible rightly, to build a strong foundation of their Christian faith and values, and also to foster a community of young Christians that engage and encourage one another.

Currently, we have five study leaders to help facilitate our Bible studies for the youth in the hopes of growing them. And to maturity in Christ.

And we have about 10 to 15 regular youths. And we meet on Saturday evenings online at 7.30pm. So if you are a parent of a youth, and these are the ages of Form 1 to Form 5, so that's 13 to 17.

[1 : 18] If 12 years old, that's fine as well. You can contact me, and I believe my contact details are on our church website. So don't be shy.

Do come and approach me if you would like to have your children, youth, join our EYM meetings on Saturday evening, 7.30pm.

Alright, so that's my little sharing for our EYM. And so today's passage is taken from Joshua chapter 1, as you heard Angelica read earlier just now.

And I believe all of you would have had your sermon outline distributed to you through your cell group leaders. And hopefully that will help all of us this morning as we move along the passage.

So before I begin my sermon this morning, I'll just say a short prayer, and then we can get right into it. So let's pray. Father, we just want to thank you this morning for giving us this opportunity to indeed just hear your word freely.

[2 : 19] And Lord, as we've prayed, Lord, that there are places in this world which are under severe persecution, and they are unable to enjoy this freedom that we have this morning.

And Lord, I just ask, Lord, that you will help us be teachable, help us to be malleable to your Holy Spirit. And ultimately, Lord, help me to speak clearly and faithfully from these words of yours, Lord.

Let me just commit this into your hands. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, Church, imagine this scenario. You are chosen to be a team leader, this new team leader for this big project.

And you know there's going to be a lot of challenges in making this whole project successful. The problem is you'll have to work with people in the team whom you know for a fact that they are difficult to work with.

And what's more difficult is that you actually don't have a choice to wiggle your way out of this leadership position. And on top of that, this project that you're working on as a team determines if you keep your job or for students, whether you pass your subject or you graduate wherever you are.

[3 : 33] So, this sounds a little bit like if you're a football fan getting chosen to be a new football manager for a Premier League team. And I hope this scenario kind of helps us, paints a picture of the situation we find ourselves in here in Joshua 1.

Now, Joshua 1 is particularly big news because this is a pivotal point in Israel's history. And just a small note here that there will be some other Old Testament scripture references, which I hope will help give a bit of context and a bit of clarity to how God is working his narrative through Israel in this time.

So, coming back to Joshua 1, we find ourselves in the time of history in Joshua 1, after a long, long wandering in the wilderness.

And because of the disobedience and rebellion against God in Numbers chapter 14, a whole generation of Israelites, except Joshua and Caleb, could not enter the Promised Land until they had died off.

Now, Israel had been waiting 40 years, 40 long years, to finally take possession of the land flowing with milk. And in the next step we see in verses 1 to 4, God is getting Israel to prepare to possess the Promised Land.

[5 : 11] So, part of this preparation, as we can see in verses 1 and 2, was a transition of leadership of Israel.

A transition of leadership of Israel. In verse 1, the change in Israel's leadership is happening because God's servant, Moses, had died.

And Joshua was now taking the reins. This transition, however, was not as sudden as Joshua had long been commissioned before by Moses under God's instruction.

And in other words, Joshua had been, in fact, preparing to take over Moses. But even though this commission happened before, and Israel knew it, as human feelings go, it was impossible not to feel some weight of responsibility taking over Moses, on top of preparing to lead Israel into Canaan.

Now, just a bit of a backstory. Moses was described in Deuteronomy 34, verses 10 to 12, as someone incomparable.

[6 : 27] It says, I'm paraphrasing here, no one in Israel was like Moses, or as great as Moses, or as wondrous as Moses in Israel. Nevertheless, the endurance of God's promises, as we see here, does not depend on the achievements of man, but solely on his sovereign will.

What God needed from Israel wasn't just a man of caliber, but an obedient servant who would trust and be faithful in the Lord.

And Joshua was such a man. And needless to say that in the preceding chapters of Joshua, we see that Joshua became a great leader, that Israel stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses.

Now, with Israel's new leader in place, God commands Joshua in verses 2 to 4, to lead God's people across the Jordan River into God's promised land, which God had promised to Abraham long ago in Genesis.

And we see God's faithfulness here, in verse 3, where God assures Joshua that he will keep his promise to Moses that wherever they set foot, that land shall be Israel's.

[7 : 57] God, in this pivotal point in Israel's history, brings together the past, the present, and the future promise.

Joshua was now to arise and cross the Jordan to the land that God is giving to them, the present, where every place that Israel's foot will tread in the future is given, just as promised to Moses in the past and to Abraham in the past.

But God doesn't just stop there. God knows that the monumental task at hand that Joshua has to undertake and further displays his faithfulness by assuring Joshua of his presence with him.

We see that in verse 5, As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you, nor forsake you.

And then we see again, at verse 9, the Lord says, The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Just as a parent comforts and encourages their child before a big state performance or a big football game or something, God does the same here with Joshua at the start before taking center stage.

[9 : 23] For Joshua, just as it was with Moses, to perceive the presence of God in every undertaking by Israel was the cornerstone of success.

Without God, there will be no fruition of God's plan for Israel. But with God, Joshua is assured victory in every challenge that he was about to face.

For God promised, no one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. No one. And all the days of your life.

In verses 6 to 9, God now commands Joshua after assuring his presence with him and his people, God commands Joshua to be strong and courageous.

And God repeats this command to Joshua three times. You see that in verse 6, 7, and 9. What is interesting is that this command is in fact not a new one.

[10 : 36] And in fact, Joshua and Israel were given the same command before from God through Moses in Deuteronomy 31, 6 to 8. And I think this is another display of faithfulness by God to Joshua flowing from verses, from verse 5.

To be personally assured in the very same words to which Moses had said, I believe would have been great encouragement and assurance being gained from these words.

And now this command to be strong and courageous in fact puts a response in Israel's hands. Here, the response at verse 6 to 9 reveals two facets of response, which are the facet of faith and the facet of obedience.

So firstly, let's talk about the facet of faith. The two key verses are verse 6. Be strong and courageous for you shall cause these people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

That I swore their fathers to give them. Next, we'll need to jump ahead to Joshua verse 9 where God says, be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged.

[12 : 05] This is the same instruction to Joshua from Deuteronomy chapter 31 verse 6. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them.

Now, what these two verses address that plague Israel are two things. Fear and doubt.

You see church, the element of fear and doubt and terror easily struck Israel. We can see that when Pharaoh chased Israel to the Red Sea or when the spies made their reports from Canaan.

The response was fear and doubt first. And Israel was plainly a real bunch of scaredy cats. even with a pillar of fire with them and the act of splitting the Red Sea before them.

They were still responding easily to fear and doubt. Therefore, this command was needed because of the great challenges that lie ahead in claiming the land.

[13 : 22] There were physical battles to be fought, enemies to overcome, cities to be taken. Israel under Joshua had to fight 13 battles and each time against a different opponent.

But God here has promised yet again to be with his people, his presence with Joshua and Israel, his presence there to give them strength and courage to overcome these challenges.

So, what God is actually saying essentially here, laying down the foundation for the response for Israel and Joshua to say, I trust you.

I believe in what you can do, God. They, Israel and Joshua can be strong and courageous by pressing on in faith not only because of God's power but of God's faithfulness to his people.

You, God could be all-powerful but if he wasn't faithful that would be a whole different story. But here we have a God who is not only powerful but a God who is ultimately faithful to his promises and to his people.

[14 : 46] And Israel and Joshua can gain assurance and confidence in this journey to the promised land because of that. And we come now to the second facet here where it's the facet of obedience.

And we see in verses seven to eight now we're at verses seven to eight if you've just joined us. God commands how Joshua and Israel are to live and moreover what they will reap if they live according to God's instruction.

Now the command is particularly emphasized in the opening words of verse seven. Be strong and very courageous. And going on to 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.

[16 : 02] I'm sorry. So that's the end. Then you will be prosperous and successful. So God expressly gives out the formula for Israel's prosperity and success in their journey to the promised land.

Now this command again is fitting for Israel because responding in obedience has always been a real struggle for Israel.

As I mentioned earlier the two examples of how Israel was easily subjected to fear and doubt Israel had another problem. They struggled to obey God's laws and instruction.

A prime example of this is the worshipping of the golden calf. When God was close to Israel at Mount Sinai speaking to Moses Israel instead at the foot of the mountain was far from God worshipping a foreign God a God that they made themselves.

So remember the scenario I painted from the start. Joshua very well knew the character of Israel and there was probably a fear by Joshua that Israel themselves would be rebelling against God again under his leadership.

[17 : 24] relationship and this was very much justified I believe as Joshua was there when Israel failed to trust and obey God. Remember the spies?

And that resulted in a denial of a whole generation into the promised land. So the command in verse 7 and 8 was crucial to both Joshua and Israel as a fresh reminder a fresh start again from God as they start this new point in Israel's history to place their trust their faith and obedience in him.

So verse 7 says obey the law given by Moses don't turn from it and we see here that God's word was central to Israel's success.

Now they were heading into a foreign land Canaan was a foreign land who would not share the same faith in the living God. Outside influence would be constantly nagging at Israel and we have seen how such influence has brought the fall of future kings of Israel in the Bible.

Now Joshua had to be very courageous to conduct himself and conduct Israel in accordance with God's law as he led to Canaan either in battle or outside of battle.

[18 : 58] And verse 8 says to keep the book of the law always on your lips and meditate on it day and night. So what does this mean? this means to say that God's word is constantly and continuously spoken read and discussed.

However, this is not just a personal act to be done by Joshua although the command was given to him. As one commentator puts it, the word meditate in verse 8 actually is translated elsewhere to mean murmur.

murmur. And the implication is that the meditation was not fundamentally a private action for example someone having quiet time but rather a corporate act together publicly.

Joshua had to ensure that God's word was at the center of not only his own life but at the center of Israel's life.

Keep my word at the center Israel is what God is saying here. At the center of how you live how you act how you speak how you think it was to be both personal and communal private and public keeping the word central.

[20 : 28] You see Church Israel could have declared their faith that God was with them. However, if their lives did not show it, the words of their mouth would not matter.

Their faith had to shape their obedience to God's law. If you have faith in the law giver, the natural inclination is to obey the given law.

Israel needed to respond not only in heart and in mind, but in action on their part. In other words, you've probably heard this before, they had to walk the talk.

Obedience was Israel's faith in action. Their faith in action. God and so we see at the end of verse 9 the commands that God has given to Joshua and Joshua would then in verses 10 to 11 step into action and we see in verse 10 to 11 Joshua instructs his people Israel to get ready to cross the Jordan into Canaan within three days.

And this was Israel's first opportunity under Joshua to respond in obedience and faith to God's instruction. And what's interesting is that we see Joshua was eager to get things going and gave the command to move up within three days.

[22 : 11] And imagine how much you had to prepare in those three days. You had to roll up tents, herding your animals, preparing your armaments for battle and all that. But what I would really like for us to kind of focus here at this stage is in fact in verses 12 to 18.

There was a particular instruction to two and a half tribes of Israel or if you've the other words they were described was the eastern tribes, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and a half tribe of Manasseh.

So a bit of context to put this into perspective. The too long didn't read version here is that the eastern tribes were settled in the lands on the east side of the Jordan River, outside of the boundaries of the promised land in fact.

But this settling down however on the east side was approved by God during Moses' time. But this approval of settling on the eastern side of the Jordan River was subject to some terms and conditions.

As a lawyer, we love terms and conditions. The approval was subject that the eastern tribes would join the rest of Israel in claiming the land that was promised.

[23 : 26] Otherwise, they could not settle. Now if you would like to see the full story of how this unfolds, you can find that in Numbers chapter 32. So Joshua was facing a potential problem here.

We have part of Israel already receiving their inheritance, subject to terms and conditions, whereas the rest of Israel still had to journey on to Canaan.

And Joshua needed to remind them of their arrangement, the eastern tribes' arrangement with Moses. Because the unity of Israel here was crucial in taking the land.

As we can see in verse 2, that the command from God was that to Joshua was you and all this people. All of Israel had to cross the Jordan.

All of Israel had to press on together in claiming the land that God was giving. If the eastern tribes had turned away and reneged against what was promised, imagine the discouragement that would overcome the rest of the tribes.

[24 : 44] Imagine the anger, the frustration that would follow just after spending 40 years wandering, waiting for the inheritance that was promised. But the story, of course, is otherwise, because we see in verses 16-18, that the eastern tribes pledged their continued participation with Israel.

They recognized that only together, when the other tribes of Israel had settled in the land across the Jordan to have rest, will they be able to return to the rest that God has provided to them.

Now, equally important was their reply of, only be strong and courageous. And to me, I think there was a wonderful exclamation mark to end chapter 1, only be strong and courageous.

And this is a clear pledge by the eastern tribes, a clear pledge of faith and obedience to what was required in verses 6 to 9.

And we can safely assume that whatever God commanded Joshua earlier in the verses was communicated down to Israel, as we see in verse 16, the eastern tribes answer.

[26 : 07] The answer with, all that you have commanded us, we will do. Only be strong and courageous. They were committed in their faith and obedience to God's instruction, and made good their arrangement with Moses.

By doing so, they did three things. They exercised faithfulness in God, they encouraged Joshua to faithfulness, and they encouraged the rest of Israel to faithfulness.

God's So, now at the end of chapter 1, I wouldn't be doing a proper job if I didn't point, after all this, after chapter 1, point all this to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Because God is working here. He is revealing his plan of hope and redemption throughout Israel's history. So, all this points to the future hope in Christ.

So, we see here, church, Israel transitioning from one leader to another, from Moses to Joshua.

[27 : 20] Now, great earthly kings would follow after Joshua, as we know. But no matter how great Moses and Joshua was, all but were temporary men, all were mortal men, men who were subject to sin, men who were subject to death.

But these men in Israel's history were a foreshadowing of someone greater, someone perfect, the true and perfect king of God's people, Jesus Christ.

And the same goes for the promised land that God had promised so long ago to Abraham. For Israel was being led to Canaan, a land of blessing and prosperity under God's rule, where they would enjoy rest.

But this was not to be the final home for God's people. For Canaan and the rest it offered was only a foretaste church, of a place greater and more perfect.

And that place is the perfect and eternal heavenly kingdom, free from enemies, free from sin, free from pain, and free from death.

[28 : 37] To enter this perfect final rest in God's perfect kingdom, that comes with the salvation offered through the perfect and true king of Israel, his son, God's son, Jesus Christ.

And that work, that salvation is offered through the work on the cross. And speaking of the cross, we see the obedience and faithfulness demanded from Joshua, Israel, and the eastern tribes.

Jesus Christ models the perfect obedience for God's law and instruction, living a blameless and holy life, obedient to the Father's will up to his death on the cross.

And just as Joshua in obedience would go on to defeat all the enemies of Israel in conquest of the promised land, with Jesus' obedience to death on the Calvary, was the final blow struck to seal the defeat of sin, of sin, Satan, and death.

The writing was on the wall, my friends, even in Joshua 1, foreshadowing that ultimate victory already secured in Jesus Christ.

[30 : 05] church, how then does this, what then does this mean for me? How do we press on together in faith and obedience?

Now let me offer a few suggestions this morning. So firstly, friends, let me say this, cling to the knowledge of God and his faithfulness because knowing who you are placing your faith in determines your outcome.

Now you've probably read or heard this phrase before. The phrase is faith in humanity restored. You've probably read it or seen it online.

Now if we really think about this phrase, it's a little bit foolish. Stop to think and look at what humanity has done and is capable of doing and you will see humanity is subject to sin and imperfection.

Why do we keep wanting to put our faith in humanity? Humanity will fail you one day and we see this exemplified in Israel time and time again.

[31 : 25] but think about it this way. No matter how much faith that you place on thin ice over water, no matter how great the faith you put in it, if you walk on that thin ice, I will assure you it will fail to carry your weight and you will fall into the freezing waters.

But conversely, if you had zero faith, now I'm being a bit extreme here, if you had zero faith to walk on totally frozen solid water on a river, no matter what amount of faith, no matter how little your faith is, that thick solid ice will carry your weight.

You see church, the object of your faith determines the outcome. And as we have rightly sung this morning through the song, O Church Arise, when faced with trials from every side, our outcome is secure.

So if you're joining us this morning, or you have been following us, and if you do not know Christ, I want to let you know that the opportunity to put your trust in Jesus Christ, a God that is faithful and will never leave you nor forsake you, is always open.

And I hope that today will be that day. Secondly, for those of us who claim to know the Lord, let this passage, church, be a reminder to you that God is always with you.

[33 : 06] God's presence with us is assured, even as we make this life's journey to our perfect promised land with King Jesus.

for when you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, God's presence through the Holy Spirit will be there. He will be there to lead and guide us and teach us and give us wisdom and strength as we journey to the promised land.

We will face many challenges in the world, and by God's grace, we don't have wars to fight, unlike some parts of the world, but no matter where we are, we will be challenged in our lives as we seek to live out the ethical demands, the holy living of the gospel, be it at work, be it at school, in the home, or as we interact socially with others as we live this life.

In today's world where morality is persistently bent out of shape, and where taking a stand for your Christian faith and values can be deemed discriminatory, or even in some cases and some countries, it can be a legal offence.

It will take strength and courage, church, strength and courage, friends, to live the life that Christ has called us to. So I say to you, my friends, be strong and courageous, for the Lord your God is with you always.

[34 : 47] Now this doesn't necessarily mean that all will go smoothly and you live with minimal conflict, but friends, the hope that Christ gives as he has also lived in faith and obedience to the cross and was victorious on that cross should encourage us, friends, that the outcome is secure, the outcome is determined, that the war is won, victory awaits us.

We just need to press on, my friends, in faith and obedience to see that end. And in the same vein to press on, we need to keep God's word at the center of our lives.

Our core convictions capture this in today's passage, to be centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Are we striving to live according to what the gospel demands of us?

Are we constantly digging deeper into God's word day by day, striving to maturity in Christ? Are we meeting together as a community, as a church body, to encourage one another, to teach one another, to correct one another?

Now, I know the current COVID climate does make physical meetings impractical, but let's let that not be, let's not let that be a distraction to press on in faith and obedience together.

[36 : 19] Let's press on by getting on board with our E100 reading plan, keeping the weekly Bible reading as a habit. Let's press on faithfully by attending Sunday service like you this morning, even if it's online, to be spiritually fed by God's word.

Let's press on by meeting together in our cell groups, in our youth groups, in our mom groups, or whatever groups that you have with one another, to read and study and discuss God's word together, and to pray for one another in thankfulness and in need.

My friends, as I close, allow me to end by saying, let us not just claim our faith in God, but let's put that faith in action through obedience of how we live our lives on this journey.

God is with us, friends, so we can be strong and courageous in pressing on together in faith and obedience. Let's pray.

Father God, we just thank you for your word this morning. We thank you for the confidence and the assurance that we can have because you are near, you are with us, Lord.

[37 : 46] And whatever challenges and whatever trials that we face in this journey of life in this world today, Lord, we know that this outcome is secure, Lord.

we can claim victory. And Father, we just ask, Lord, that you will help us, encourage us, use us to encourage one another together to spur one another on in faith and obedience.

Lord, we know that sometimes the going can get tough, but Father, we know that through the hope that your son Jesus Christ has given us, we can endure and we can press on.

We just pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.