

Series: *Bright Beginnings*

The Faithfulness of the Father in the Face of A Funeral

Josh 1:1-10

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.

Introduction

Last week we looked at the great power of prayer. The Lord was sweet to me & my family (& a boat load of other people) and answered a prayer we prayed. We went whale watching on Monday. As we began to pull out of the dock the guide prepared us not to see any whales. I prayed with the children that we would. We saw more whales that day than any other tour this year. God answered a whale of a prayer for us.

Today we begin a new sermon series from the book of Joshua entitled, ***Bright Beginnings***. This 8-week series will carry us through the summer right up to our annual celebration Sunday on September 7.

We chose this book and this title of the series, Bright Beginnings, for several reasons. First, Joshua is a book of beginnings and we want to rejoice in the new beginnings here at Hope.

Lamentations 3:21-24

*But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
23 they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
24 The LORD is my portion, says my soul,*

therefore I will hope in him.

This is one of the amazing qualities of our Lord, His mercies are never exhausted and they come to us in fresh new abundance every single morning. We don't have to be defeated by yesterday's failures. We need not be weighed down by the guilt of the past. As we confess our sins, He forgives us and wipes away the filthiness of our sin with the clean water of fresh new mercies. This is reason to hope and this is reason to celebrate **bright beginnings**.

Read Along With Us

As Iain & I prayed together about what book might help prepare us for Bright Beginnings, Joshua seemed good. We then shared this with the elders and it seemed good to them too. We recognize that many of you will be traveling this summer and taking vacations and will not be able to be with us each week. I'd like to ask that you just begin reading this book with us. Since we only have eight weeks, we obviously will not be able to finish the whole book, but we will pull out major points. If you are reading along with us while you're away, then perhaps the Holy Spirit will draw your attention to the same issues.

The Faithfulness of the Father in the Face of a Funeral

The title of today's sermon is *The Faithfulness of the Father in the Face of a Funeral*. At first, it might seem like a strange title given the fact that the series is about bright beginnings. However, it's in the text and we can not ignore it. The book of Joshua begins with a funeral. At the bright beginning of this new nation came the stinging sadness of the death of the first and greatest prophet Israel ever had. Bright beginnings are born in the soil of sad endings.

In the Hebrew, the text begins with a conjunction which being translated literally would read "*and it came to pass after the death of Moses...*"¹ The conjunction makes clear the connection with the previous book in the Hebrew canon, which is the book of Deuteronomy. The final chapter in Deuteronomy records the death and burial of Moses. The book of Joshua then begins with the same subject and we are forced to face a funeral within the first few words.

The Faithfulness of the Father in Keeping His Promises

The book of Joshua is permeated with the theme of the faithfulness of the Father in fulfilling all of His promises. The book records the children of Israel entering and conquering the land that was promised. The Father had been faithful. He had kept his promise.

A Delayed Promise or A Promised Delay

It had been about 500 or 600² years since the promise first came to Abraham (Gen 12:6-7; 13:14-15; 15:7; to Isaac Gen 26:3-4; to Jacob 28:13-15 & 35:12), yet they stood on the border of the fulfillment of God's great promise.

¹ Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1981) p. 56.

² Dale Ralph Davis, *Joshua: No Falling Words*, (Scotland, UK, Christian Focus Publications, 2000), p. 22. See also Gen 12:4; 25:7. The promise first came when Abram was 75 years old. He lived to be 175. His son Isaac lived to be 180 (Gen 35:27). Jacob lived to be 147 years, the last 17 of which were lived in Egypt (Gen 47:28). There were 430 years of captivity (Ex 12:40) in Egypt (cf. Acts 7:6).

Do not think that the length of time it took for the promise to be fulfilled in any way indicates lack of power on the part of the Father. From our point of view there may be been a delay. However, the delay in the promise was part of the plan. God graciously told this to Abram beforehand to keep him (and us) from being discouraged.³

Genesis 15:13-16 *The Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. 14 But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions... 16 and they shall come back here in the fourth generation..."*

The fulfillment of this original covenant promise is the central theme of this book. It is repeated from beginning to end. The faithfulness of the Father is so significant in the mind of Joshua that it shapes its final words to this new nation.

"And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good words that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed." (Josh 24:14)

God the Father is faithful. He has kept all of his promises and not one word has fallen short. The goal of the entire book of Joshua is for you to put your faith, all of it, completely and whole-heartedly, in a faithful Father who **always** keeps His promises. Nothing can stop the Father from keeping all of His good promises, not even a funeral. In fact, the Father sent His only Son to this world so that he could pass through a funeral, namely His own, so that He could guarantee what the Father had freely and graciously promised.

The Faithfulness of the Father in Seen in Six Ways

As we come to the text this morning we'll see God's faithfulness in six ways.

1. The Faithfulness of the Father in Sending a Servant
2. The Faithfulness of the Father in Sending a Successor
3. The Faithfulness of the Father in Giving a Great Gift
4. The Faithfulness of the Father in the Promise of His Presence
5. The Faithfulness of the Father in the Provision of His Word
6. The Faithfulness of the Father in Sending the Son

1) The Faithfulness of the Father in Sending A Servant

"Now it came about after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord..." (1:1)

The text states that Moses was a "servant of the Lord." God was faithful in sending Moses to Israel as a servant and not a harsh leader. He was a bold leader, yet he was meek in character (Num 12:3). Moses was unlike any other prophet. He spoke to God face to face as a friend (Ex 33:11). God used him in ways he used no other man.

³ All of the Old Testament was written to encourage us. Romans 15:14 *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

The people loved him. When Moses died the people wept for him for thirty days (Dt. 34:8).

Moses' eulogy is recoded in Deut. 34.

7 Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated.

10 And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, 11 none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, 12 and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

Moses had been the leader of the children of Israel for forty years. He had led them faithfully night & day, through sea and sand, in plenty and poverty, through blessings and cursings. Moses was the only leader they had known. When they had wanted to know God's will, Moses had been the one to tell them what to do.

And now, on the brink of the greatest day in the history of Israel, the one leader they loved and trusted had died. Imagine the thoughts that would have gone through their minds. Who will lead them now? Who will tell them the will of the Lord? Who will give them water out of the rock now? Who will instruct them in the way they should go?

Why had God done this? Why did He take their leader? Why could Moses not enter the land with them? Will they be able to stick together? Who will lead them into battle against their enemies? Why at the moment when everything appeared right did the Lord remove Moses? What was the Father up to? It didn't look like the Father was being very faithful.

I wonder how many doubted that God's promises would be completely fulfilled *without* Moses? How many thought that God's hand of favor had been removed from Israel when Moses was removed? I wonder how many were tempted to believe that God's promise had fallen when Moses had fallen?

How many of them doubted God's faithfulness when God's servant had died? Would they find the Father faithful when facing the funeral of the greatest leader they had ever known? I wonder how many of them had mistaken the power of a faithful Father for the power of faithful servant?

It is a merciful blessing that God sends good and faithful servants to lead his people. But it is a subtle and sinful mistake to put more confidence in the faithful servant rather than in the faithful Father who sent the servant. We humans have a default tendency to put more trust in servants we can see rather in the faithful Father we cannot see.

2) The Faithfulness of the Father In Sending A Successor

Yet the Father knows our weaknesses. First, the Father demonstrated His faithfulness in sending a servant, Moses. Then He demonstrated His faithfulness in sending a successor, Joshua. If anyone doubted that God would still speak to Israel after the death of Moses, God sent Joshua to remove that doubt.

(1:1)

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant.

Yes, God would still speak to Israel after the death of Moses. The Father would not leave them without a leader? The Lord spoke to Joshua. He would be the leader. A faithful Father had provided a successor.

The faithfulness of the Father is not dependant upon one person. God uses many people to fulfill His purposes for each generation.

For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers (Acts 13:36)

Every great leader will one day pass on but our faithful Father will always raise up another. Passing leaders does not mean God's promises have passed. After the death of Moses, God raised up Joshua to continue fulfill His promise to lead Israel into a land that would be their own.

3) The Faithfulness of the Father in Giving A Great Gift

The third way we see the faithfulness of the Father is in giving a great gift.

(1:2-4)

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.

The Father was giving them this land and it was a great gift. The Father is speaking in these two verses and He says twice in these two verses that he was giving this land to them. The fact that the land was a gift is mentioned two more times in the first chapter, in verse 11 and again in verse 13. The point is they didn't deserve it and they didn't earn it. The land was a gift.

Moses had taught them this.

Deut 9:4 "Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land, whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. 5 Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. 6 Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people. (see also Deut 18:12)

Moses was warning them against self-righteousness. The Father gave them a gift that they did not deserve. They were a stubborn people. They did not receive the land because they were holy and righteous. They received the land because the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites and all the other inhabitants of the land were utterly wicked.

We should also note that one can only give what one owns. You can't truly give away what you do not already own. The Father can give this land as a gift because He owns it. In fact, the Father owns all the earth and every person who lives on it.

Psalm 24 reveals this truth.

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.

The land was a gracious gift that God had chosen long ago to give to the children of Israel, not because they were better than all the other peoples of the earth, but simply because God freely chose to bestow His good favor upon an undeserving stubborn people. This land was a gift and a great one at that. It comprised some 300,000⁴ square miles, an abundant gift with ample room⁵ for all the tribes. Here again we see the faithfulness of the Father in giving a great gift.

4) The Faithfulness of the Father in the Promise of His Presence

Fourth, we see the faithfulness of the Father in the promise of His presence. For me, this is the sweetest, most precious promise in the entire Bible.

(1:5-6)

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.

This is exactly what Joshua needed to hear. No doubt he wondered if God would be with him like He had been with Moses? This is precisely what Joshua needed to know. I'm convinced Joshua was the kind of man who had watched Moses and taken note of how he led. As Moses' assistant, Joshua had learned that, if the Lord is not with you, you can do nothing.⁶

Threatened Removal of His Presence

He learned this at the incident with the golden calf (Ex 33). Moses went out to the tent of meeting to speak with the Lord and Joshua was with him (vs.11). Because of the rebellion of the people in worshiping the calf, the Lord said to Moses, *"If for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you"* (Ex 33:5). *"I will send an angel before you... but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people"* (Ex 33:2-3).

Moses responded, *"If Your presence will not go with me, then do not bring us up from here. 16 For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in Your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and Your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"* (Ex 33:15-16)

⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible* Vol. II Joshua – Psalms, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1982), p. 4.

⁵ The fullness of these borders were never realized until the days of David & Solomon.

⁶ *"For apart from Me, you can do nothing."* John 15:5

Moses was saying, “Father, I you will not go with us, then we will not move. We will not go if you do not go with us. We are not leaving with You!” Moses knew the only thing that was different about the Israel was that the Father was among them. Moses wanted to be where the Father was and He did not want the job of leading Israel without the Father leading him.

After talking with God Moses left the tent (Ex 33:9-11), but Joshua didn’t.

9 When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. 10 And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. 11 Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

Why didn’t Joshua leave the tent? Because Joshua was more interested in being in the presence of the Lord than he was in being in the presence of Moses. Abiding in the presence of a Great God does not even compare to being in the presence of great man.

Is This Promise for Us?

But, is the precious promise of His presence also for us? You might be thinking, “Well that promise was given to Joshua not to me.” What reason do we have to cling to that promise for our lives today? I’ll give you two reasons.

First, the author of Hebrews quotes this verse (Josh 1:5) and uses it as a basis for finding contentment in life.

Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” so we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Heb 13:5-6 with verse 6 quoting Psalm 118:6)

The only way to be content in life no matter how much or how little you have is to realize that you can have the unimaginable treasure of the very presence of the Lord with you which is far, far greater than simply having money or owning things!!

If you have the presence of the Lord in your life, then you lack nothing that money can provide, in fact, you lack nothing at all!! And if the presence of the Lord is with you, then what can anyone do to you? Since the Lord is your helper, do not be afraid!!!

Second, this promise is for us because Jesus Himself gave us this promise. The final words of Jesus to his disciples recorded in the book of Matthew are, “*Behold, I am always with you, even to the end of the age.*” (28:20)

A faithful Father gave Joshua a precious promise; that His presence would be with him just as He was with Moses. That promise is for us through faith in Jesus. The very God who made good on His promise to Joshua and was with him until the day he died, is the same faithful Father who offers that same promise to us who are His children and to all who would by faith become His children.

5) The Faithfulness of the Father in the Provision of His Word

The fifth way we see the faithfulness of the Father is in the provision of His word. The Father gives Joshua the keys to success, which is not defined in terms of career, cash, or possessions. And if you have a Bible in your hands then you hold it too.

(1:7-8)

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.

God's word should fill our mouths and our minds. The Father is perfectly clear, (**reread verse 8**) the way to make your way prosperous and to have good success is to obey all that He has commanded. If there is anyone in this room who desires success & prosperity (*not as the world defines it, but as God defines it*), it comes through obedience to the commands of the faithful Father. And how do you know the commands of the Father, but by meditating His word day and night?

David picks up on this in the very first Psalm.

*Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
3 He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.*

We naturally think about things we enjoy, things we delight in. The question for us then is, do you meditate on the law of the Lord. The word here for "law" is torah, which means instruction. When David was writing it specifically referred to the first five books that Moses had written. However, for us, we have the benefit of the addition to the testimonies of eyewitnesses of Jesus' life.

Both of these references (Josh 1 & Psalm 1) hold out for us a view of God's word that might be challenging, that is, that God's word (i.e. the Bible) should be in our eyes such a delight that we think about it day & night. That we meditate on it all throughout the day.

It's as if we had a verse in our minds and we mull over it and think about from every angle and each new contour holds a new blessing. We need to be in God's word *every day*. You need to read and treasure the Scriptures each and every day, night and day.

Memorizing Scripture

Friday night we were at the Holders for dinner. We were sharing favorite verses and Olivia quickly (& smiling) quoted her favorite verse. It was obvious that she delighted in that verse and she had been meditating on it. Is God's word so close your mind that you could spout off a verse if you were suddenly asked?

It is through treasuring God's word and delighting in it that we become increasingly obedient which then leads to a life that God will bless and our way will then be prosperous & successful.

This doesn't mean that life will be free from conflict. Joshua was just entering the land that he would have to fight for. But he would never fight alone. You may have many battles left to fight, but you will never fight alone if you are His child through faith in Jesus.

The Faithfulness of the Father in Sending His Son

If obedience to a faithful Father seems like a battle you cannot win, then consider the faithfulness of the Father in sending the Son. Where we fail to obey, Jesus perfectly obeyed. He never disobeyed the Father, not even once. He perfectly obeyed and so we trust and rest in Jesus.

Heb 10:7 says, "*Behold, I have come to do your will, O God.*" Jesus perfectly obeyed His father. That is why we put our faith in Him. I hope you are trusting in Him this morning. If not, won't you trust Him to day?