**BE STRONG AND VERY COURAGEOUS**

August 4, 2019

Joshua 1:1-18

Key Verse 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.”

In the last week’s message, we learned that the heavenly worship is going on 24/7. The church is victorious, and all God’s people are worshiping God together with millions of angels. Our end is written. All our struggles will not be in vain. Not only that God promised that we will be victorious while on earth. He gave us the promised land, which is our present spiritual inheritance. It is ours by God’s promise, but we must take it by obeying God’s word, claiming the promises and fighting the good fight of faith. In the next 6 weeks, we will study the book of Joshua. The book of Joshua is a story of the conquest of Canaan, the promised land. It was theirs according to God’s promise, but it was not given free of charge. They had to fight and conquer the land. Why? It is so that they may learn God’s mighty power and faith in God. Human beings are so forgetful. Joshua 24:31 says, “Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who out lived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel.” But Judges 2:10-11 says, “After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals.” In one generation, the Israelites forgot about God. Likewise, our victory in Jesus is assured. But we have to fight a good fight of faith and claim the promised land by faith. Through it, we may learn faith and experience God’s power.

**First**, the background of this passage. Let’s first look at the background of this text. The people of Israel were encamped on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River. Moses, the great man of God, had died. 40 years ago Moses has led the children of Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land in accordance with God’s promises. Moses then sent 12 spies in to spy out the land of Canaan--the land that God has told the Israelites to go in and possess. 10 of the spies came back with a bad report because they were afraid. They discouraged the Israelites that the task of taking the land was beyond them. They said, “We saw the Nephilim (that is, giants) there. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes.” (Numbers 13:33) But the representative from the tribe of Judah, Caleb, was a faith-filled man. He quieted the people and countered the discouraging report: “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.” (Numbers 13:30) One other man who had spied out the land supported Caleb’s positive report. He was Joshua, from the tribe of Ephraim. Together he and Caleb confirmed that their trust was in God: “The land we passed through…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.. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.” (Numbers 14:7-9) However, the Israelites trusted the report of the ten spies because of fear. They even said that they should choose a leader to go back to Egypt. God was angry at their unbelief, and he made the Israelites wander in the desert 40 years until that generation except Caleb and Joshua had died. Now only Caleb and Joshua are left from that original generation. And now Joshua is standing on the threshold of Jordan, almost 90 years old with the 2nd generation.. He is about to see what Moses never saw--the taking of the Promised Land--and he is worried. The size and duration of the task ahead, the pressures of leading such an obstinate people, and the absence of his spiritual mentor, Moses, were heavy on Joshua’s mind. But the Lord said to him, “Be strong and very courageous.” As we prepare for a new academic year, let us listen to God’s command, “Be strong and very courageous,” so that we may conquer the University of Toronto with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Second**, be strong and very courageous (6-9). Look at verses 1-2. “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.’” These verses are an implication that as Moses crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, so his people under General Joshua's leadership, will cross the Jordan River--as their fathers crossed the Red Sea by faith. These verses also imply that God would not give them the promised land free of charge. They must cross the Jordan River where the enemies made a defense line. In short Joshua, the successor of Moses, must fight and conquer the promised land. From God’s point of view, the promised land was the promised land, but it would not be given without any cost. They had to conquer and drive out all the inhabitants of all kinds and take possession of the land.

The territory of the promised land was not a small one. It was a vast land with over fifty tribes of people. Look at verses 3-5. “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 Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up 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.” The people of Israel were not strong enough to fight against so many enemy countries and defeat them. But it was possible when their leader was strong and courageous.

In verse 6, God said to General Joshua, “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.” At the beginning of verse 7, God says to Joshua, “Be strong and very courageous.” Three times God repeats “be strong and courageous.” Here we have to think about what it means to be strong and courageous. Alexander the Great says, “I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep; I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion.” He emphasized the importance of a fearless leader.

One of failed leaders is King Saul. Saul disobeyed God out of his inner fear. In 1 Samuel 13, he was surrounded by Philistine army with 3,000 chariots, 6,000 charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. But Saul had only 600 soldiers, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. (1 Sa 13:7) Saul was in a big trouble. Out of panic, he felt that he had to do something. So he offered up the burnt offering, and thus disobeyed God’s command. He should have waited for Samuel to come and offer up the sacrifice. Saul was a king, not a priest, and only priests were to offer sacrifices according to Leviticus 6:8-13. When Samuel confronted him, Saul made a lame excuse, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD’s favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.” (1 Sa 13:12) He should have remembered Gideon who defeated the 135,000 Midianite soldiers with 300 men, and stood firm without fear.

On the other hand, God commanded Joshua to circumcise the Israelites at Gilgal (Jos 5). It was the very foolish decision from the military point of view since the enemy was nearby. They would be completely defenseless. But Joshua obeyed God without fear.

Jesus trained his disciples to be strong and courageous. Once they met a storm on the sea of Galilee, and they began to panic. But Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples went to Jesus and woke him up, said, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. Jesus rebuked the disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

But we have good examples of those who were strong and courageous. In Daniel 3, Daniel’s three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were pressured to bow down and worship the image of gold King Nebuchadnezzar set up. They were threatened to be thrown into a blazing furnace. Out of panic, they could have yielded to pressure. But they were strong and courageous. They said, “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (Da 3:17-18) Under the threat of death, they stood firm without fear.

Look at verse 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.” Also verse 8a says, “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.” What does it mean to meditate? Meditate is defined by Webster’s dictionary as “to think deeply.” The application is to read with thoughtfulness, to linger over God’s Word. In the Hebrew language this word means to chew, digest and allow it to become a part of your very being. Have you ever gotten a song in your head you can’t stop thinking about? It keeps coming back over and over again. That is the idea. So we should study the Bible every morning before doing anything else so that we may mediate on the word of God. Otherwise, we are overwhelmed by money problems, troubles at work, past sorrows, and we become very weak.

This is the way we can be strong and courageous: by keeping the word of God in our hearts as our life standard. Sometimes we want to fall down to the left; sometimes we want to fall down to the right. But the word of God holds us to stand firm. Without the word of God, we become scatterbrained and soon, promiscuous. One’s weak heart is not pleasing to God. We must have the word of God in our hearts and stand firm. Therefore, Colossians 2:6,7 says, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” These verses fully explain that we must take root in the word of God and keep growing as a big tree so that we may not fall down because of the stormy winds or the ever-changing worldly pattern of life. When we summarize what we thought about so far in this passage, we can come to the conclusion that without God’s help we cannot be strong and courageous. God has given us the mission to feed the University of Toronto students with the word of God. However, Satan is ruling this campus with a mighty power. In fact, our invitation ministry was met with great disappointment. We begin to have fear. Like 10 spies, we say, “They are far too powerful for us to conquer! Their hearts are tightly closed up. The walls are too high to break.” How can we conquer this campus with the gospel of Jesus Christ? We need to hear God’s encouragement, “Be strong and very courageous. Do not be terrified.” We will break the walls of the devil and go in and conquer the campus.

**Third**, people recognize Joshua as their commander (10-18). Joshua could have complained about God’s command for its impracticality. He was facing a daunting task. The cities of his enemies were well fortified. Their soldiers were well trained. They had advanced weaponry. The army of Israel was a joke compared to the Canaanite armies. The Israelites were not well trained. They had no equipment. The only thing they were good at was complaining. They complained just about everything. But God did not help Joshua with any of these deficiencies. God told him only to be strong and courageous. And Joshua showed his faith by accepting the word of God in his heart. He obeyed the word of God. Joshua’s first critical test of leadership was to cross the Jordan and prepare for many battles ahead. Joshua ordered the officers of the people to go through the camp and instruct people to get ready to cross the Jordan. Joshua learned to co-work with other leaders.

However, there was one issue he had to resolve in order to have a unity among them. The Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh had arranged with Moses to possess the land east of the Jordan--the land they had already secured. These tribes had no incentive to risk their lives to cross the Jordan River and fight against the strong Canaanites, because they already had their land. They could just settle there and not care about the other tribes. But such selfish action would be detrimental to their unity. So Joshua reminded them of their promise to engage in battles along with the other tribes until the conquest of Canaan was completed. The conquest of Canaan required their combined efforts. At Joshua’s challenge, the two and a half tribes promised their full obedience to him. They prayed for God’s presence and blessings upon Joshua. They were willing to be front-line soldiers. They urged Joshua only to be strong and courageous. When Joshua obeyed God, all his people were willing to follow him absolutely. The two and a half tribes accepted Joshua’s leadership. They were willing to obey and follow his instructions absolutely. Why? They first submitted themselves to God’s leadership. They also were willing to fight not only for their families but also for the people of God as a whole.

Through Joshua chapter 1 we learn that God successfully established Joshua as Moses’ successor. At the time of appointing him as Moses’ successor God gave him the command, “Be strong and very courageous; be careful to obey the Law of God; don’t turn from it to the right or the left.” As we face a new academic year, let’s face it with courage so that we may boldly claim the victory by obeying the word of God and fighting the good fight of faith.