

***Joshua: God Keeps His Promises***  
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series  
Fall 2022  
Pastor David Palmer  
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**TEXT: Joshua 1:1-18**



Good morning beloved. We begin this morning a new series this fall on the book of Joshua: “God Keeps His promises.” The book of Joshua marks a significant shift, a turning point in God's Word. It is the completion of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. It's a transition to a next generation of leadership. It's a book that raises questions for us about the nature of warfare, how battles are fought and won. It's a book that will challenge us to faithfulness to God's Word. It's a book that raises questions and fears that we have within us. It's a book that signals for us the power of discipleship for generation to generation, as we will see. This morning as we begin, we look at Joshua 1, and I want you to see with me what the Lord has shown me, and that is first to see Joshua's own discipleship as it's played out as a prelude to our text this morning. We will see that Joshua has been prepared for his role through a discipleship that happened through Moses. We will see that Joshua faces an enormous task. Some of you right now are beginning a new school year, maybe a new position at work, and you are acquainted with that sensation of feeling of: “What I'm being asked to do is beyond me. It's more than I can handle.” The book of Joshua will speak right into that. Some of you this morning may be fearful, and that's okay. God's house is a safe place to be. Joshua himself is acquainted with these fears and receives a word from God that He will be with him wherever he goes. The book of Joshua covers an epic lifetime, and it's going to be our privilege to look at that together this fall. It's a journey that starts on the east side of the Jordan, and it will end later this fall for us as we dwell in the midst of the land that God has promised. So let's take a look at this text together.

In Joshua 1:1 we read:

*“After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant.”*

If you compare other translations of Joshua 1:1, you will see that Joshua is called a number of different things. The ESV says “assistant.” The King James says Joshua was Moses' “minister.” The New American Standard says he was Moses' “servant,” and the NIV says he was Moses' “aid.” So which is it? Is he an aid, servant, minister, assistant? The Hebrew word that is used here is a word that signals a special relationship that Joshua had with Moses over many years. It's a relationship that we can rightly call the discipling relationship. Joshua is mentioned 27 times in the Pentateuch before we read of him in Joshua 1:1, and I want to point out just a few highlights of that relationship.

The first time that Joshua is mentioned in the Bible is in Exodus 17. It is in the context of a battle with the Amalekites. In Exodus 17:9, Moses speaks to Joshua and says:

*“Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”*

In the context of this battle, Joshua fights the battle, but he observes that the key to the battle is actually Moses' prayers and outstretched arms, and this is a very peculiar way to fight battles. Most people throughout history count their troops, align their weapons, trust in their strategies, but in the Bible, battles succeed by outstretched arms in prayer. That's how the battle succeeds, and when Moses' arms start to fall from weariness, then God raises up two men, Aaron and Hur, to come and lift up his arms. When he can no longer stand, they bring a stone for him to sit on. The first lesson of Joshua's discipleship is the very peculiar way that the God of the Bible wins victories.

We see Joshua again in Exodus 24, the moment of covenant-making. It's Mount Sinai. It's God's presence on the top of the mountain, and the Lord calls Moses up to the mountain to the place of God's presence. He invites the elders to come up. God is visibly present, and the elders eat and drink with God. They see His glory, and as Moses begins to approach God's presence, In Exodus 24:13, we read:

*“So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God.”*

Joshua is present in the tent of meeting. He hears God speak the Word to Moses. He is the only other person there, so his discipleship begins with the God who fights very peculiar battles. His discipleship continues with the God who speaks face-to-face as with a friend to Moses to reveal His Word and His will for our lives. He sees the divine presence and knows the importance of God's Word to shape our identity and life together.

Joshua's next lesson of his discipleship is a lesson of failure. Do you learn from your successes? Do you learn even more from your failures? We learn often more from our failures than our successes. In Numbers 11, Moses has been leading the people. We've crossed out from Egypt. We're in the wilderness. The people are complaining and grumbling, and they start to make plans to go back to Egypt. They start reminiscing about the cucumbers, melons, and the leaks, and they somehow leave out the oppression. Moses is weary, and he says to God in Numbers 11:14:

*"I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me."*

And the Lord says in Numbers 11:16-17:

*"Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, ...And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone."*

We have a team of elders at Kenwood, and this is an immense blessing. It's a godly group of men and women who pray for this church and try to keep us pointed towards Jesus Christ. It's too much for any one person to carry, so the Lord does this: He takes and He pours out His Spirit and the 70 elders start prophesying. It's glorious, and there are two additional men, Eldad and Medad, in the camp. The Spirit is resting on them and they are prophesying in the camp. Then Joshua says in Numbers 11:28: *"My lord, Moses, stop them."* This is a profound leadership lesson because early developing leaders tend to think they can do it on their own. They tend to think that they're the only ones who are really necessary, and Moses replies to Joshua with a great line that you need if you've been in ministry for a while. Moses says in Numbers 11:29:

*"Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!"*

That's the aspiration, Beloved. The aspiration of the Bible is that all of you would know His Word and be filled with His Spirit so that you can see God's truth in the present moment that you're in and live it. That's the goal, not just that I or Pastor Scott or the elders who are visible leaders, but that all God's people were prophets.

Joshua's discipleship continues in Numbers, and he is sent with a group of people to spy out the land. There is a representative from each tribe named. In Numbers 13:8, it is Hoshea, the son of Nun, who is named, and they are sent out to spy out the land. In Numbers 13:16, we read:

*"These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua."*

Here we discover that Joshua is actually a change of name. Changes of names are significant in

This Hebrew name means “he has saved” or “he has rescued.” At a certain point in his discipleship, Moses changes his name to Joshua. There is a big change from Hoshea to Yehoshua, because Moses adds in the short form of the divine name Scripture. Joshua's given name is Hoshea, like the prophet Hosea. Yahweh, and now his name no longer means, “he has delivered” or “he has rescued.” It means, “the Lord is salvation.” For the rest of his life and service, he will bear the name of God in his own name.

Joonhyuk just confessed his faith in Christ and declared that publicly through baptism. For the rest of his life, he is visibly identified as a believer in Jesus. In our name as a Christian, we bear the name of Jesus Christ. Joshua is sent with a group of others to the land. It's a beautiful land flowing with milk and honey, and yet there are people there, and most of the spies are terrified, fearful. Yet, Joshua and Caleb return with a testimony that the land which they passed through is an exceedingly good land. They report in Numbers 14:8:

*“If the LORD delights in us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey.”*

The final stage of Joshua's discipleship is when God calls him to succeed Moses. This is a major responsibility. I think at every major pivot in a believer's life, you turn in response to God's call. If you miss one of those turns you are going to end up somewhere else. But those major turns happen as a result of God's call. You may be headed for one of those major turns: an acceptance at the University, a taking of a new job, asking someone to marry you. Major life decisions happen for the believer in response to God's call. That's why anytime I meet with a young couple considering getting married, I always ask them the same question: “Are you getting married out of a response to Jesus' call? Is this an act of obedience to Christ?” This is the case for Joshua. In Numbers 27:18-20, the Lord tells Moses:

*“Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey.”*

If you look over at me from the side right before I'm coming up to preach, you'll see me muttering. I'm always praying the same thing right before I walk up here, and that is: “Lord, fill me with the Holy Spirit and come Holy Spirit in this place.” Joshua was filled with the Spirit,. He's commissioned to lead, and then Moses gives him a blessing in Deuteronomy 31. If you are discipling someone else now, this is an instructive template for the stages of discipleship. Moses speaks openly with blessing to Joshua in Deuteronomy 31:8:

*“...you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to*

*give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."*

How powerful it is when an older brother or sister in Christ looks you in the eye and says, "The Lord will be with you. Now you go do it."

This has all happened before we get to Joshua 1:1. Joshua's discipleship is long. It's over many years, and now in Joshua 1:2, we read that Joshua receives a particular commission from the Lord as the Lord speaks to him directly:

*"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."*

Joshua's task is enormous. He is entrusted with leading God's people. And remember that it's 600,000 families that have come out of Egypt, so it's not a small group. It's not even a big group. It's an unmanageable, unwieldy, easily afraid, ready to grumble and complain, not sure about God's promises, having been oppressed for 400 years so lacking a little bit of competence group, and that's the group you're leading. It's a group who's never seen the land, ever. It's like my trying to convince you this morning that you should want to go to heaven, and you've never seen it. It's like my trying to convince you that you want to be part of the New Jerusalem which comes down from glory, and you've never seen it. So how will you navigate toward it? How will you set your course? You have to bank everything on the promises of God. Joshua will cross the Jordan. That's what happens in Joshua 1-5. The Lord says in Joshua 1:3:

*"Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses."*

This is Joshua 6-11, from the wilderness and to this Lebanon, as far as the great River Euphrates, the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea, which is the Mediterranean, this vast territory, and then equitably distribute the land. This is Joshua 13-22. And the Lord says in Joshua 1:5:

*"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."*

And these are the last two chapters of Joshua, Joshua 23-24. This opening statement is really an outline of the whole book, and as we traverse Joshua, we will face some significant topics.

Michael Hattin, a Jewish commentator, says that the narrative of Joshua describes:

*"divine intervention and human initiative, understanding the physical geography as well as the metaphysical sanctity of the land of Israel, attempting to delineate the parameters of just warfare, contrasting individual choices with communal responsibilities, and recognizing*

the awesome struggle of forging disparate tribes into the united people of [God].”

*Joshua, xvi*

How will that happen? God says to Joshua: “That's what I'm asking you to do.”

Some of you remember the first time you had a formal job description. Do you remember that? You look down and you feel excited or motivated, and sometimes you look on the formal job description and you have this sinking feeling like: “There's no way in the world I'm going to be able to do that.” Some of you may be starting school with trepidation, thinking: “How will I be able to master the content of second grade?” I remember second grade. Second grade is not that easy. There's a lot more going on. However you look at what is in front of you, when you see it, you need a word of encouragement.

God speaks a threefold word of encouragement to Joshua. Three times in this passage, the Lord says: “*Be strong and courageous.*” This double imperative, be strong and courageous, is spoken to Joshua, not as an imperative for Joshua to well up his own strength. The imperative, “Be strong and courageous,” is not something that is laid on Joshua as an additional burden, like “Here is your huge and overwhelming job description, and by the way, be strong and courageous. I'll see how you do.” No! The summons to be strong and courageous is God's promise, as we will see. So, let's look at each of these.

The first “*Be strong and courageous*” is in Joshua 1:6:

*“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 one of the scariest uses of the second person singular personal pronouns in the Bible. Some of you are thinking you don't have a love affair with personal pronouns. But, you should. You should love them because they're important, and this one in particular is important. It's unnecessary because the Hebrew verb is inflected in the second person singular, and yet God's Word places that little tiny word “you” in front of it. It's not needed, and yet it's there for emphasis. The Lord is saying to Joshua: “Be strong and courageous because you have a specific task that I'm giving you—to no one else.” Your task is a divine responsibility, and whatever God places in your hands, He has given it to you. This is incredibly helpful in the Christian life. It keeps us from looking at what He has given to others. It keeps us from comparing our ability with others, which is always a lose. It either stokes your pride or crushes your neighbor. It's always bad. It's what God has given you, and this is what God has given to Joshua.

The second “*Be strong and courageous*” is in Joshua 1:7:

*“Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses My servant commanded you.”*

Joshua is summoned to be strong and courageous so that he would be careful and diligent to know God's Word and live it. Joshua is not being asked to prepare for a Bible trivia exam. Joshua is being asked to know God's Word. You and I need to know God's Word. We need to be saturated with it, because the way that God thinks is different from the way you think and I think, almost every time. We prepare for battles in a human way. We plan to get ahead and think that success is determined by our strategies or personal charisma. God says you have to know His Word. The Torah of Moses is both the narrative and what you might call the legal portions. Know all of the Word. It's in the narrative that you discover how God really wins battles through prayer. It's in a narrative that you discover that you and I are made in the image and likeness of God and called to reflect His glory in the world. The Lord tells Joshua not to turn from the right or the left. We are tempted with both of these turns. Sometimes we are tempted to turn to the right, and when we turn to the right, we tend to add things to God's Word. When we turn to the left, we tend to neglect things in God's Word. The Lord tells Joshua: “Hold onto My Word – all of it, not just to know it, but to live it.” in Joshua 1:8, the Lord says:

*“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.”*

Meditate is a good translation. The Hebrew word that's used here, though, is a word that's used of animals when they make sounds. It's a word that is used of the coo of a dove. It's the word that's used for the growl of a lion. It's a word that's used for a characteristic sound that a creature makes. When we think of meditation, most of us think of silent reflection. Biblical readers of God's Word are not quiet. They read out loud.

I have a set of cards in my car that are Scripture memory cards. When I was in graduate school and I worked at UPS from 2 o'clock in the morning till 8 o'clock in the morning and then went and did my graduate work, I would memorize passages of Scripture. It was so loud in the factory that I could speak it out loud and say it for hours and didn't bother anyone. The image is that God's Word is on your lips and you're talking about you. We need to talk to ourselves and remind ourselves the truth of God's Word. It's the same image in Psalm 1: “to delight in the law of the Lord and on His law speak, meditate, murmur.” Let God's Word shape your identity. May it shape our identity as Kenwood and our community.

The third challenge to Joshua is in Joshua 1:9. The Lord says again:

*“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.”*

When you step into a new space, when you step into a new role, when you take on additional responsibilities, when the circumstances around you are more complex than you understand, you need Joshua 1:9: *“The Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”*

Joshua is commanded three times in our passage, in this same way: “Be strong and courageous because I've given you something specific to do.” “Be strong and courageous. Pay close attention to My Word—all of it—so that you can do it.” “Be strong and courageous, because I will be with you.” This is where the power of living is to be found.

The chapter ends this morning with our first glimpse at Joshua's expression. I was going to say expression of leadership, but I changed it. I changed it because what we really see in the book of Joshua is not some glorious picture of leadership, but what we really see is faithful service. I really appreciate what Kit said. She said she's been in “the Lord's service” in Thailand for 20 years. That's what you do: serve the Lord wherever you are, wherever I am, and the first expression we see of Joshua's service to the Lord is in the final scene of this chapter. Let me show you very briefly what he does.

First, ***he does not lead alone***. He commands the officers of the people. This is the same group that God put His Spirit on. So the first thing he does is proliferate visible leadership.

Secondly, ***he keeps the Lord in front of the people's eyes***. He tells them in Joshua 1:11:

*“Prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess.”*

Joshua builds into the hearts of the people that this is really about the Lord not about him. It's what the Lord is doing and they were together following Him. Real biblical leaders don't ask you to follow them. They say: “Follow me as I follow Jesus.” Joshua restates the Word of God and binds people to obey it: “Remember the word Moses spoke.”

Lastly, and I think this is very beautiful, ***Joshua allows the people to keep him accountable to God's calling in his life***. The last scene is when the people expressed their willingness to go. They say In Joshua 1:16-17a:

*“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.”*

Then, their last summons to him is to reflect back to him God's calling, and they say to Joshua in Joshua 1:18: *“Only be strong and courageous.”* Joshua allows the people to hold him accountable.

So, as we start this fall series, Joshua 1 calls us all to action in a few ways.

First is a challenge to **devote time to the power of discipleship**. That was our theme last year, but we're going to look this year at Joshua, Luke, Titus, and Timothy, and we are going to see in the Bible that this pattern of investing the life of Christ into others can be seen inside the Scriptures. So, I want to challenge you to be in a discipling relationship, one-on-one, in a micro group.

The second is the specific call to all of us to be strong and courageous, specifically, in the ways that God told Joshua, and that is to **embrace the entrusted responsibility that God is giving you**. What has He placed in your hands right now? Are you a student? Are you working? Are you caring for an aging parent? Are you guiding your grandchildren? Do have people that work for you or students that you are mentoring? Whatever God has placed in your hands, uniquely in your hands, be strong and courageous and receive it.

He also gives all of us a call to saturate—and I use this word intentionally—saturate our soul. I want you to saturate your soul, your imagination, your aspiration, your speech, your vision for the future, your lifestyle choices. **Saturate our lives with vision and direction from God's Word**. I want your soul to be saturated like that with God's Word. There's no quiz or exam, but if you don't have God's Word coursing through your mind and heart, then you will end up supplying your own vision for your life. You will guide your lifestyle choices, the way you spend your time, energy, and money, and you'll determine that by what the culture suggests. You'll either decide on your own, your peer group, the society around you. We all need God's Word to reveal how life is meant to be lived.

Finally, the Lord calls us to **welcome God's presence in every place, every space, every relationship, every task**. Whenever you feel tempted to feel alone or abandoned, you need God's promise to Joshua: "I am with you wherever you go." You are loved and held secure. You are empowered and not limited to your own resources. You are called forward in faith and not to remain back in fear. These are lofty callings, aren't they? These are challenging summons, and these are things that we often neglect. We neglect our responsibilities. We put them off. We imagine they're for others. We neglect God's Word, and we get distracted by other voices. We hold back in fear. This is what the Bible calls sin—to miss God's intention for our lives. The good news of the Scriptures is that Jesus Christ, who is the Joshua who is to come, has atoned for our sin. In Psalm 32:5, David says:

*"I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."*

Micah 7:18 asks:

*“Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in steadfast love.”*

First John 1:9 says:

*“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

So, this morning, we have the privilege to partake in a remembrance of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, who on the night in which He was betrayed took bread and broke it in the presence of His disciples and said: *“This is My body which is broken for you.”* He took the cup and said: *“This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you.”* This table is not the table of Kenwood Baptist Church. It is the table of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this morning, if you are willing to express a commitment to Christ, I invite you to partake. If you are not there yet, that's okay. If you're not ready to say: “Jesus, I hear You calling me this morning to be strong and courageous”; if you say: “I am not ready for the responsibility You have put in my hands”; if you say this morning: “I'm not yet ready to pattern my life by Your Word”; if you say this morning: “I don't know that You are with me”; if that's where you are this morning, then just let this moment pass by. It's okay. But if you're ready this morning to say: “Jesus I hear You speaking to me,” even if that's the first time in your life, and you say: “Lord, You've placed these children, you've placed this life, these students, these responsibilities, in my hands. You've done it, and I receive it”; if you say: “Lord Jesus, I hear You, and I want to know Your Word, and I want to learn it so I can obey it and follow it and shape my life by it”; if you're ready and you hear Him this morning, “Be strong and courageous. I am with you,” then welcome Him in and partake with us in joy.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your grace and power, Your mercy and Your joy. We thank You that You speak to us this morning.

In the matchless Name of Jesus, Amen.