



## **BE CONFIDENT!**

We live in a time when the language of 'righteous', 'just' or even 'holy war' is being spoken again. Whether it be jihadi groups like Hamas or Hezbollah, or even the US, Russia and Israel, the concept of a war sanctioned by God is very much back on the agenda, for some people at least.

Now while it may make us feel uncomfortable to talk like this, as Christians we are engaged in a war. Not in the way that the Crusaders or the Saracens did it 1000 years ago, but a war, nonetheless. Because we're all called to advance the gospel or good news, to extend the influence of the kingdom of God, into enemy territory. Each of us as Christians, and each and every church, has our own part to play, our own territory to claim.

So, over the next few months we're going to look at a book that focuses on this subject – the book of Joshua – and what it takes to see the kingdom of God advance, not just in us but the lives of those around us.

We're going to sharpen our swords and prepare for war.

### **Joshua 1**

It's approximately 1200 BC.

Moses is dead; Joshua has taken on his mantle; the wilderness has gone; the Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land! And God says exactly the same thing to Joshua as Jesus says to His disciples, as He's about to send them out into the world; a word that should be part of the DNA of every

Christian and every church: "Go!" (Matthew 28:19-20). In fact, if you were to ask me to sum up the entire book of Joshua, it would be with this one command:

'Go.'

It takes a lot of confidence to be a 'going' people, and that's what this chapter is about. Confidence. What does true, biblical confidence look like? There are 4 expressions used in vs9 to describe it: 2 positives, 2 negatives (and the positives get mentioned 3 times in this chapter, so God obviously leans to the positive):

Be strong; be courageous.

Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged.

What do these commands teach us about confidence?

**1) Be strong.** The Hebrew word *chazaq* literally means 'be firm' or 'be fixed', like a tent pegged to the ground in a storm. We can put our confidence in lots of things: strategies and resources and talents and people. Now those things are important (as they used to drum into us at Bible college), but not most important. God is saying, "Be confident in *Me*." It's like Jesus' story of the wise man who built his house on a rock – we need to build our lives and our thinking on Jesus and what He says. Not on what the world says (this week): on what *He* says.

**2) Be courageous** or *amatz* in Hebrew. It means 'be alert' or 'be ready', like a soldier. And what are we meant to be ready for? "To do all that I have commanded." I.e. be ready to put your faith into action – and as Christians, that includes sharing it with others. Some people see this as an optional extra: in reality, it's an intrinsic part of following Jesus. What did Jesus say when He called those first disciples? "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). The message both then and now is: "Grasp what you're here for – get ready to march."

**3) Do not be terrified** or *al-ta'arotz* in Hebrew. It means 'do not be awed'; 'do not be intimidated.' I.e. steady those knees! Trying to follow Jesus in an unbelieving world can feel like an uphill struggle. We might face it at home, at work, at school, with friends – people and situations and arguments that can seem daunting. The message is: "Remember who's boss; remember who's in charge." As Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28). Or as they say in some parts of Africa, "Apart from God, I fear none!"

**4) Do not be discouraged.** In Hebrew this phrase, *al-techat*, literally means 'do not be below' or 'do not fall', like a collapsed wall. That's a pretty accurate description of how it feels to be discouraged, don't you think? And it can come in various forms (e.g. disappointments, criticism, mistakes, both real and perceived) and from all sorts of places – sometimes the world; sometimes the church. Whatever its source, it is always a choice: we have to *allow* ourselves to be discouraged, to be affected negatively. God is saying, "Don't give into it: choose the positives!"

I.e. be confident.

Which is all well and good, but where do we get that level of confidence? The answer is right here, in vs7-8. 'Meditate' literally means 'talk it over', and 'day and night' is a Hebrew way of saying, 'as often as you can.' I.e. we're to read, think about, and talk about the word of God, as often as possible – on our own, with our loved ones, with our church. Reminding ourselves again and again of God's commands and promises. The more we do, the more equipped we will be to fight the good fight of faith.

The word of God is a compass, and as long as we adhere to that, He will equip us and be with us.

*That's* where our confidence comes from.

### **Time To Advance**

So, Joshua assembles the chiefs of the tribes of Israel, and gives them their marching orders. And that includes those tribes who had arranged to settle east of the Jordan: Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh. Joshua says: "We march, together." And they respond with the words of God:

"Be strong and courageous!"

Some of us, if we're honest, would probably prefer to stay east of the Jordan: "But it's quiet; it's comfortable; it's safe. Nice scenery, plenty of manna ... why go any further?" But the reality is: it's 2<sup>nd</sup> best. Even though God allowed 3 tribes to settle there, it's 2<sup>nd</sup> best. Interesting fact: go forward 500 years, and the relationship between those tribes had changed; the kingdom of Israel was being slowly dismantled by her enemies; and do you know who the first tribes to be taken into exile were?

The tribes on the east of the Jordan.

When our Christianity becomes about being quiet, comfortable and safe, rather than about God and what He commands us to do, it's 2<sup>nd</sup> best. What is God saying? Don't settle for 2<sup>nd</sup> best – move forward! There's a land out there to conquer!

So, be strong; be courageous; do not be terrified; do not be discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you ... stay?

No, wherever you *go*.

What would it take to have that level of confidence?

Let's pray and ask God to boost it!