

## **Joshua - Be Bold, Be Strong**

Over the past weeks we have been with Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and now Joshua.

Joshua was the ideal candidate to take over from Moses.

They had reached the edge of the Promised Land and Moses scanned the land from a hill top – he saw it but never entered it. The reigns of leadership were being passed to Joshua and that is what Joshua Chapter 1 is all about.

*Joshua, it's your time to lead.*

As he stood on the threshold of this new and exciting work, he was repeatedly told by God to be strong and courageous.

Moses had already charged Joshua with these words in Deuteronomy 31:7 and now God reiterated them.

*Be strong Joshua* meant that Joshua felt weak.

*Be of good courage* meant that he was frightened.

*Do not be afraid* meant that he had feelings of self-doubt, why him?

I'm sure that we have all been there at some point in our life.

*Why me Lord?*

But this is exactly the type of person God delights to work through.

When we are too strong, humanly speaking, God finds it difficult to use us – because we depend on our own strength. God wants people he can work through. That's why he chose fishermen, tax collectors and ordinary unschooled people to be the pillars of the Christian Church. Let us never forget our humble roots.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth...

*<sup>26</sup> Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.*

*<sup>28</sup> God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him. <sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become*

*for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

<sup>31</sup> *Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”*

So often we think that we know what's best. We know the way forward. We know what to do in every circumstance of life. How often do we take it to God in prayer? How often do we ask God, what is it Lord that you want us to do?

When we become like clay in the potter's hand, then and only then will God do a work of grace.

When we empty ourselves of our plans, schemes and ways of doing things only then will God step in and fill us with his spirit.

Isaiah catches this superbly well,

<sup>29</sup> *He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.*

<sup>30</sup> *Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;*

<sup>31</sup> *but those who hope in the Lord  
will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.*

How and why?

Well he writes....

*Do you not know?*

*Have you not heard?*

*The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He will not grow tired or weary,*

*and his understanding no one can fathom.*

Joshua was called to a great mission, to inherit the land, and on this mission he needed every ounce of strength that the Lord God Almighty would give to him and this is what Chapter 1 of Joshua is all about.

There are at least three places that Joshua finds strength, and I would like us to consider these now because it is where we will find our strength as we go forward to face whatever challenge lies in front of us.

**Firstly, he is to begin where Moses left off.** ...”Moses my servant is dead, now you and all your people get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land that I am about to give them”.

Joshua inherits Moses's leadership and also Moses's blessings. There is a real sense of the past going with him. As God was with Moses so he will be with Joshua.

Joshua can look back and remember the last 40 years spent in the desert working closely with Moses. The summons of Joshua to leadership was the reward for all these faithful years of service to Moses. God had used these years to prepare Joshua for leadership.

What has God been preparing your life for?

The stage of life that you are at right now, God has been preparing you for it. All these little tasks that you may have felt unimportant, God is using to fulfill his call in your life. When you look back, you can see God's hand shaping and moulding you and making you into the person that you are now – sometimes the way has been difficult and other times joyful, but nothing is wasted in God's hands.

So, Joshua begins with looking over his shoulder and realising that God has been at work in his life.

**Secondly, Joshua knew exactly what his role now was in life.** *“Arise, go over this Jordan, you, and all the people, into the land which I give to them... Be strong and of good courage: for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore unto their fathers to give to them.”*

When you know that God has called you to a specific task, you are invincible, nothing will stop you.

*"Behold, I have set before you an open door and no man shall close it".*

Revelations 3:8.

Yes, the path set before Joshua was not an easy one, read his story and you will see...Iron gates, walled cities, broad flowing rivers, giants, hostile people...It all lay in front of him...He is not invulnerable to all the difficulties and the challenges within his own people would be numerous, but he went forward determined and focused upon God's will for his life, for he believed that God had opened the door for him.

Today is Racial Justice Sunday and we are all too aware of the challenges that we face with inter-race issues. The Black Lives Matter movement being a case in point.

Today we **Remember** the importance of racial justice

Today we **Reflect** on human diversity and thank God for it

Today we are **Responding** by working to end injustice, racism and ignorance through prayer and action.

So, let me take you back to 1759, and a wee boy was born in Hull in England. He had ill health most of his life and at the age of 8 his father died and his mum struggled to raise her family. Fate would have it that he went to live his with his devout aunt and uncle, and he was then introduced to the Christian faith.

He went on to University but lived a life of ease and was far from the Christian faith until he met a friend Isaac who led him to faith in Christ.

By this time he was an MP for Hull, the youngest in Britain at 21. His whole outlook to life changed, he sobered up and devoted himself to the improvement of conditions for factory workers and then most famously to the abolition of the slave trade.

His commitment to Christ and His Word led William Wilberforce to see every human being as exactly that - a human being, and to be treated equally and fairly. Later in his life, he arranged for the famous potter Josiah Wedgwood, to create a brooch which featured a picture of a black man in chains with the caption, *"Am I not a man and a brother?"*

He had a real fight in his hands to abolish slavery, but he went forward believing that this was God's will, that God had opened a door for him.

At that time great money was made through the slave trade and 40,000 slaves each year were taken from Africa on British ships and an estimated 11 million Africans were so transported over the years with 1½ million dying on the ships.

Wilberforce knew that this was not God's will, but God's will was freedom for these slaves, and so he fought with every sinew and every ounce of breath to abolish this evil. His story is well worth reading and I can only share a glimpse of it at this time.

In 1807, the House of Commons debated the abolition, and speaker after speaker praised Wilberforce. The vote was 283 – 16 to abolish slavery. The prime minister of that time, Lord Grenville, described Wilberforce's victory as a “Measure for which his memory will be blessed by millions yet unborn.” And the historian GM Trevelyan wrote, “This was one of the turning points in the history of the world.”

But, it wasn't until 1833, that the *Slavery Abolition Act* was passed, and Wilberforce died 3 days later.

A present minister in Hull was quoted as saying that the most fitting response we could make to Wilberforce's life would be to pick up a copy of the Bible that he loved so much, read it and pray to the God that he adored, through his Son, Jesus Christ.

A life that knows the call of God can achieve great things and I am proud to call myself a Christian when I know that there have been outstanding individuals like William Wilberforce whose faith transformed the world.

**The third strength in Joshua's** life was the presence of God. God promised to go with him. *“As was I with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you, nor forsake you.”*

There was one thing that Joshua would always fall behind Moses with in his life, and that was his direct communication with God.

Of course both were in communication with God, but Joshua did it through the High priest, whereas Moses spoke directly to the Lord. It is said that he spoke face to face as a man speaking to a friend. However Joshua was equally sure of the personal companionship of his great ally, though he lacked the direct vision.

Five words would give Joshua great strength throughout the rest of his life  
*"I will be with you."*

These are words for us also this morning, that we can go forward trusting in the God who has blessed us in the past; we can trust in the God who has given us a direct call to serve him; and we can trust in a God whose presence is ever near us.

As Christians, we go forward with a greater assurance, and that assurance is in a God who has come to us. A God who has entered our world and space, and who has taken the form of a human being. For at the heart of our Christian faith is this great truth, that the God of Jesus Christ is none other than the Almighty God.

He has come to us that we might be in relationship with the Almighty God. He has given us access to his Father and the access has come through his sacrifice on a cross. He laid down his life that we might be freed and so he invites us all to come to him today, and to trust in his unfailing grace and his redeeming love.

You might think that I'm not worthy of this, but you see we come to him like Joshua, aware of our weakness and failings and doubts and fears and we come to a God who says to us through Christ, *I am with you even unto the end of the age*. You see, if we feel weak and vulnerable and sinful today, well that is exactly the right way to come to God. For we don't come to show our perfection because we don't have any, we come to show our weakness and in doing so, he will receive us, forgive us and renew us and make us whole again. The blood shed on the cross is for our forgiveness, it makes our peace with God.

I invite you now to come and share communion today. Come just as you are, come with all your weakness and let Christ cleanse you and forgive you today.

As we prepare to come, let us worship God with the hymn....394 *He came to earth...*