



A FAITHFUL OLD SOLDIER

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

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Joshua 1:1-2

First Message

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The book of Joshua recounts the story of Israel's entering into the promised land of Canaan and her defeat of thirty-one Canaanite kings. Following the Exodus from Egypt, Israel failed to enter the land by faith. The Israelites wandered around in the wilderness for forty years until an entire generation had passed away. Even Moses was not allowed to enter the land. Joshua, his successor, became the commander-in-chief who would lead the conquest of the land in an amazing seven-year campaign.

When we think of the book of Joshua, we think of battles. Songs like "The Battle Belongs to the Lord" come to mind. We think of the tumbling walls of Jericho and fantasize about conquering kingdoms and tearing down strongholds. It is true that much of the book of Joshua is about warfare, taking on new territory and defeating enemies, but there is another theme in this book, and that theme is worship. Before the warfare begins, in the midst and at the end of the battle there is worship—and, we should note, corporate, never private worship. People assemble and listen as the Word of God is read. They come into the presence of God, watch him work and reflect on what he has done. It is critical that we recognize this theme of worship. That is why I have entitled the series, "Images of Warfare and Worship."

Isn't this what our life in Christ is about? We encounter both elements in life, warfare and worship. We live in tension between these two activities. We cannot and should not try to eliminate one or the other. We should not be fighting all the time, but this is what we try to do. We keep battling and fighting, thinking that when all the wars are fought and all the enemies defeated, then we can enjoy God and worship him. On the other hand, we are foolish if we think we should be free to worship constantly and live free from warfare. Daily, weekly, yearly, we face new fears and new struggles. The book of Joshua, however, teaches that we need to have a rhythm of warfare and worship in life. We experience both elements every day. This is what we should expect, and this is how we should live.

First, we worship. This is the key to warfare. Worship is critical to defeating the enemy. We cannot sustain the battle or succeed in warfare if we do not take time to worship. And then there is warfare. God calls us to engage, to be bold and courageous, to not fear. The faith that is nurtured in worship is engaged in battle. God wants each one of us to enter the fight so that we might exercise faith and trust in the One who promises always

to be with us. God doesn't want us to sit on the sidelines. There is something experienced in the battle that can't be had in worship alone. So, as we will find in our studies in Joshua, life is a combination of warfare and worship.

The book of Joshua heads the second division of the Old Testament, the Prophets. This division includes the historical books (Joshua through 2 Kings, minus Ruth), as well as the books of the writing prophets (Isaiah through Malachi, minus Daniel). Traditional Jewish scholarship distinguishes between the former and the latter prophets. The ministry of the former prophets was to present an interpretative (prophetic) history of God's dealings with his covenant people Israel, from the time of Moses' death until the Babylonian captivity.

The author and date of Joshua is a subject of controversy. According to the Talmud, Joshua wrote his own book. The problem with this viewpoint is that the book records Joshua's death. Some scholars believe that Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, was the author. Others think that Samuel wrote it. The expression, "until this day," a phrase that is repeated in the text, indicates some lapse of time between the events and the writing. As is the case with the book of Judges, Joshua might have been written during the monarchy. What we can be certain of is that the author certainly compiled stories in a orderly and purposeful way. Furthermore, he was an eyewitness of some of the events he described, because he uses a personal plural pronoun in 5:1 and 5:6. We also know that the author was very familiar with the book of Deuteronomy.

The book of Joshua was written to continue the sacred history of Israel begun in the Pentateuch, in order to keep alive for future generations the memory of the acts of its covenant God. The book reminds God's people that he is fully able to perform, fulfill and accomplish all of his promises. God promised Israel a land, and the book of Joshua establishes the fact that God kept his word.

We can learn much about Joshua even before we encounter him in his book. Let us look at some verses, first, from Deuteronomy, and second, from the book itself:

Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew

face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of Israel (Deut. 34:9-12, NASB).

Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel" (Joshua 1:1-2).

As we come to our first study on the life of Joshua, I want to consider four dimensions of this man's life and character.

First, let us look at Joshua's training for leadership. Joshua's life prepared him for his role as a leader in Israel, as the following incidents demonstrate. As the son of Nun, he belonged to the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8). He was the "attendant of Moses from his youth" (Num. 11:28). Moses appointed him leader of the Israelite defense against the attack of the Amalekites at Rephidim (Exod. 17:8-16). Joshua served as personal minister to Moses when Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the law (Exod. 24:13; 32:17). Joshua was in attendance when the Lord spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting outside the camp (Exod. 33:11). Joshua learned the value of God's Spirit from Moses when he restrained two men from prophesying (Num. 11:27-29). Joshua was one of the twelve spies who searched out the land while Israel was in the wilderness. He and Caleb stood against the majority in their conviction that they should enter the land (Num. 14:6-9). Caleb and Joshua were spared when the rest of the spies were struck dead (Num. 14:30, 36-38). At the end of the forty years in the wilderness, only Joshua and Caleb followed the Lord and remained alive at the end of the period (Num. 26:65; 32:12; Deut. 1:34-40).

Joshua was commissioned with Eleazar by Moses to apportion the land for inheritance (Num 34:17). When Moses asked the Lord for a leader and shepherd of Israel to succeed him, God told him to anoint Joshua, "a man in whom is the Spirit," to lay hands on him and to place some of his authority on him. Joshua was commissioned by Moses before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation (Num. 27:15-23). Moses repeated to Israel that Joshua was to be his successor, and Israel was charged to encourage Joshua (Deut. 1:38; 31:3). Moses encouraged Joshua to be strong: "Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings; so the LORD shall do to all the kingdoms into which you are about to cross. Do not fear them, for the LORD your God is the one fighting for you" (Deut. 3:21-28). "Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an

inheritance. And the LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear, or be dismayed'" (Deut. 31:7-8). The Lord himself commissioned Joshua at the tent of meeting in the presence of Moses: "Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you" (Deut. 31:14, 23).

Joshua spent years in training under the leadership of Moses. He was a young man when he left Egypt, and he was with Israel for forty years in the wilderness. When Moses died and Joshua was commissioned, Joshua had to be at least seventy years old. Obviously, God took a great deal of time and expended great effort to prepare Joshua as leader of his people. At a time when most men retire, Joshua was prepared to play his most important role.

That is how God's kingdom operates. God's leaders are chiseled and built over a long period of time. They are Mt. Rushmore-like projects; they are Grand Canyons etched out by the constant flow of history. God's leaders are not created quickly; they are not magically produced. God's men and women are the right people for the right time, because God has been involved with them in a long-term discipleship and training program. In our fast-paced, high-tech society this truth can be hard to hear. We are more bedazzled and charmed with people like Bill Gates, not with the Joshuas of the world. We are enamored with 21-year-old sensations. The world hangs on every word that Tiger Woods speaks and every product he endorses. The trend is toward the young and successful.

But things are very different in the kingdom of God. Believers have to be willing to sign up for God's long-term plans for their lives. Are we willing to wait, to submit, to serve? God may want us to be second in charge, or wander around in the wilderness for forty years, waiting on him. It may take time before God's plans for us are clear. Are we willing to be faithful for the long haul?

Second, God does not want his people to have a retirement mentality when it comes to warfare and worship. He does not want us to work hard, get comfortable and coast. This might sound good, but it is a fantasy produced by retirement funds and golf courses. Life will consist of rhythms of warfare and worship all the way to the end. Some of the greatest things that God wants to do with us may occur later in life.

God's old soldiers never retire. Billy Graham is going to be in San Jose in the fall for a crusade. Here is a man who could have retired years ago, but he didn't. He's pressing on, serving God in his great ministry of evangelism. I think of Eli Fangidae in Indonesia. The older this man becomes, the more territory he's willing to take on and the more projects he's dreaming up in his efforts to reach people for Christ. I think of our own Walt McCuiston who has a wonderful ministry in Mol-

dova. Walt supposedly retired a few years ago, but God has him involved in ministry more than ever so that today he's still bearing fruit for the kingdom.

Third, the value of older, faithful soldiers to the body of Christ is immense. The younger generation needs the model, example and wisdom of the older generation, and they in turn need to recognize their value to the young. I work with people in their twenties, and I know that most of them would love to have an older person in their life, a mentor, a shepherd, a friend who could shed some light on their journey, someone who has been through the wars before them, a voice of encouragement. Most young couples and their families would be enriched by having an older couple in their lives with whom they could share their joys and struggles. In an ideal world all of us would have both an older and a younger person in our lives, one to learn from and one to mentor.

A couple of Sundays ago we had a lunch here in the church to honor the volunteers who have been serving so faithfully among us over the years. These are the people who are committed to serving us week in and week out. What a mess we would have on our hands without them! As I looked around the room, I noticed that most of those being honored were of the older generation. God's leaders are trained over a long period of time.

The apostle Paul would agree. His last words were written to his young son Timothy to encourage him to fight the good fight, to be a faithful soldier for the long haul, to pass on to faithful men who would teach others the things that he had learned.

The second dimension of Joshua's background that strikes me is his qualifications. Two phrases that describe these, written prior to the book that bears his name, come to mind. First, Joshua, along with Caleb, "followed the LORD fully" (Num 32:12); and second, he "was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him" (Deut. 34:9).

What qualified Joshua as a leader was not a diploma or a degree, it was godly character. Joshua was a man of God who followed the Lord completely. He sought godly character over world recognition. He was sold out to obeying the God of Israel. Moses was able to pass on his spirit of wisdom when he commissioned Joshua to succeed him. Evidently, there was something more than just a symbolic act taking place when Moses laid his hands upon him. Any man or woman who is considered for leadership should be measured by character and a heart to follow God. And even if you aren't a leader, there is nothing more essential for entering the land than wise character.

I cannot impress upon you enough the importance of this truth. There are so many things competing for our attention, so many opportunities to take advantage of. And it will always be this way. There will be more to do and more to gather and more to achieve than we can

possibly accomplish in one lifetime. The one thing that will help us most on our journey in life is godly character. As we get older, life gets tougher. It gets better, it gets sweeter, but it gets tougher. The issues become more complex, the decisions more gut-wrenching. If you want to be ready to face the battles that will come in your life, then start following the Lord fully now. Get on your knees night and day and beseech him for his spirit of wisdom. As Proverbs says, wisdom is more valuable than gold and silver.

In the paper last week I read a story about students cheating in an advance placement test at Saratoga High School. Recognizing that competition would be intense, some of the best students got hold of a test prior to their exam so that they might move ahead of others in the competition for college placement. Is this the message we're passing on to the next generation, that competition is so hard it's all right to cheat? No, what we should be doing in our communities is pointing out that it is not degrees or diplomas, but character that counts in the end.

The third noteworthy dimension of Joshua's life is his role as a savior. Joshua's original name was Hoshea (salvation), but Moses later changed it to Joshua (Num. 13:8, 16), which means "the LORD is salvation." The root meaning of the word "salvation" is "make wide or make sufficient." This is in contrast to "narrow, restricted, or cause distress." That which is wide connotes freedom from distress and the ability to pursue one's own objectives. To move from distress to safety requires deliverance or salvation.

In Israel's history, salvation came through a leader who acted on God's behalf to bring about salvation. Moses delivered the people from Egypt; Joshua took them into the land and defeated their enemies. After Joshua's death, judges saved and delivered Israel; and after the judges came the kings. Usually, salvation was accomplished not by a mighty army, but solely as a result of the power of God. The leader, the savior was one who trusted in God's salvation and encouraged the people of Israel to do the same. This historical pattern built anticipation for the future Savior who would fulfill the role of a king anointed with God's Spirit.

This is what the prophet Jeremiah was referring to when he wrote these words,

**"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD,
When I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch;
And He will reign as king and act wisely
And do justice and righteousness in the land.
In his days Judah will be saved,
And Israel will dwell securely;
And this is His name by which He will be called,
The LORD our righteousness." (Jer. 23:5-6)**

In the New Testament, the name Joshua is translated "Jesus" (Acts 7:45, Heb. 4:8). Joshua is a picture of Christ and his saving work for those who follow him. God's purpose at this time was not to teach Christiani-

ty, but to prepare the way for Christ through Israel. According to Isaiah 49:8, the predicted Messiah would be a second Joshua whom God would give as a covenant to the people to establish the land and apportion the desolate heritages.

In Biblical history, three pairs of men stand out: Moses and Joshua; Elijah and Elisha; John the Baptist and Jesus. In each case, the first man would prepare the way for the one who would come after him and save. The message of Joshua is not simply to have a godly character or to see this man of God as an example for us to follow. The message is to look beyond him to see Christ our Savior, the One who delivers us from a narrow and debilitating place. Joshua is a reminder to us of the work of Christ in our lives. We have a Savior, a Redeemer, a faithful Leader whom we can follow into a wide place. Desolation and barrenness have ended. We are brought into a land flowing with milk and honey.

Finally, we note Joshua's role as commander. The Exodus is a picture of salvation from bondage and slavery; the conquest is a picture of the further work of salvation, one that leads to victory, possession and rest. Israel's entering into the land corresponds to our entering into our life in Christ. The end of the conquest is rest. But as we enter into this land there are enemies that must be faced, enemies of the flesh, the world, sin and its idols. All these things seek to stop us from entering into rest. Joshua is a type of Christ who saves, but he is also a conquering commander, the one who leads his people into the promised land, defeats enemies, and gives rest. As Joshua led Israel to victory over the Canaanites, so Jesus fully completes the picture and gives us victory over sin, over the flesh, and over the powers of darkness. This is why the writer of Hebrews says, "For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:8-9).

Life consists of warfare and worship. We will have some victories and some defeats. As we open up these pages of Joshua, I want to issue a challenge. This year we are going to war, a war not for the kingdom of earth, but for the kingdom of heaven. A word of caution is necessary: we do not enter into this war to become accepted, loved and approved. When Israel came to the banks of the Jordan, they were already the people of God. God wanted to gift them with a land that was rich beyond their wildest dreams. He had already called them out, now he wanted to take them in.

We are the people of God, having been saved by the marvelous work of Jesus, our Joshua, on the cross. We are loved, we are saved, we are secure in Christ. Nothing can change that. No victory will add to that salvation, no defeat will take it away. However, the faith that has been granted must be engaged and completed in warfare. There are enemies in our land, but they have no right to be there. They might be large and forbidding, but Christ is not only our salvation, he is our conquering commander. I want to invite you into this life of worship and warfare. Together, I want us to possess the land and enter into God's rest.

What are the enemies in your land that are keeping you from that rest? Fear? Discouragement? A troubled marriage? An uncontrollable sin? Oppressive guilt? An addiction that has a stranglehold on your life? Maybe we will have to fight our enemy until the day we die. But God loves us and accepts us and, because of this, he wants us to serve him and walk with him. Write down one or two enemies you would like to battle this year. Joshua defeated thirty-one kings in seven years. We can't take on all the enemies at once, but let us take on one or two. And as we proceed through this book, I invite us to come into worship, to pray together, and to corporately enter into this land as God's people, following the leadership of our Savior and Commander.

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