



MORE BASIC TRAINING

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

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Joshua 1:10-18

Third Message

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When we really want something in life, we spend a lot of time and effort preparing for it. Athletes spend long hours training their bodies and honing their skills. Soldiers put themselves through rigorous training, readying themselves for combat. Years of schooling and preparation are demanded before one can aspire to be a doctor, a lawyer, an architect or an engineer. No matter how much interest, desire and natural inclination we possess, we still have to work hard and extend effort and dedication to reach our goal.

It is no different with the spiritual life. We cannot become spiritual, godly people until we get our priorities in order and are willing to invest time and effort pursuing spirituality. This presents a problem for Christians whose spiritual investments are diminished by the more immediate demands of worldly pursuits.

However, there is a difference between cultivating the spiritual life and educating yourself to become, say, an engineer. Unlike engineering, the spiritual life cannot be captured solely by our own efforts and planning. We can work hard and become a good engineer, but hard work alone will not make us spiritual people. So in the spiritual life we must be involved. But God is involved, too. It is true that we cannot become spiritual without engaging ourselves, but we cannot become spiritual either without God gracing, gifting and working on our behalf.

The spiritual truths that we are learning in the opening chapter of the book of Joshua help us prepare for this spiritual life that we are describing. The foundational principles set out in this chapter form the basic training that helps us enter the "land," which is our life in Christ. In our last study we began to explore these principles. We saw that they highlighted a tension between our own efforts and God's working. On the one hand, the land comes as a gift. It has certain enemies, but no enemy can stand before us, because God is with us. On the other hand, we saw that we have to engage in battle, too. We have to keep the Word of God central to our life and worship, and we have to risk being strong and bold.

Today I want to continue to explore these foundational principles with you. Yes, we are still in a basic training mode, still in spiritual boot camp. Last week, we looked at God's words to Joshua. In today's verses, Joshua gives instructions to all the people (verses 10-11), and then he has a conversation with the two-and-one-half tribes that settled beyond the Jordan (verses

12-18). Some of the themes that we talked about last week are repeated here, themes such as God is with us, and our need to be strong and courageous. This morning, I will highlight three more foundational truths that will help us enter the land.

Joshua chapter 1, verses 10-18:

Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you, to possess it.'"

And to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God gives you rest, and will give you this land.' Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle shall remain in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but you shall cross before your brothers in battle array, all your valiant warriors, and shall help them, until the Lord gives your brothers rest, as He gives you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to your own land, and possess that which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise." And they answered Joshua, saying, "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; only may the Lord your God be with you, as He was with Moses. Anyone who rebels against your command and does not obey your words in all that you command him, shall be put to death; only be strong and courageous." (Josh. 1:10-18, NASB)

Here is the first truth I want to highlight: The purpose of entering into the land is to possess the land.

"Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 'Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, "Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, to possess it'" (vv. 10-11). The word "possess" occurs four times in our text. (The Hebrew word *yarash* is another important covenant term which we find here in chapter 1 of this book.) In military affairs, the word "possess" means to gain control over a certain area by conquering and expelling its inhabitants.

In Israel's history, the root of this word takes on a double force. In order to possess the land the enemy must be dispossessed or driven out. Once that is accomplished, covenant life and responsibility can be engaged in the land.

In the Old Testament, the words dispossessing and possessing were used of physical enemies and physical land. But this always pointed to a deeper reality. For example, Psalm 16 declares: "The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; Thou dost support my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me" (Ps. 16:5-6).

In the New Testament, we see that this inheritance, this possession, is identified with Jesus and all the blessings that are ours when we are in a relationship with him. The apostle Peter says that believers have been "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:3-4). Paul says that believers have been "sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:13-14).

God wants us to take possession of our life in Christ, but in order to do this we must dispossess the enemies in our land, the enemies of the flesh, the world, and the devil. These foes cannot stand before us because we are in Christ, but we have to cross the Jordan and go to war with them.

Do you have a closet in your home that is an utter mess and you have dreams of making it neat and useful? In order to possess that closet you must dispossess the mess! You have to begin by taking everything out of it, then you have to throw away the junk, vacuum the closet and wash down the walls. Then it is ready to be inhabited. Say you want to plant a field. First, you have to clear the land to make it ready for planting. You have to dispossess the things growing in the ground before you can sow the seed.

So it is with our life in Christ. We want to be more loving people, but in order to possess this quality of love, we must dispossess anger. We want to be more generous people, but in order to possess generosity, we must dispossess greed. We desire to serve in the community, but in order to possess this attribute of servanthood, we must dispossess selfishness.

This truth is extremely important, because it helps us to realize why we have to go to war. It gives us purpose as we face each new day. We are dispossessing the enemies of the flesh, the temptations of the world and the schemes of the devil not as an end in themselves, not to earn our way into heaven, but to possess the life in Christ that is given to us by God.

When we battle controlling bosses, deal with unreasonable parents, face overwhelming fears of rejection,

or wage war against some deep sin in our life, the Lord calls us to battle in order to take possession of our life in Christ. The battle is not about who will get a promotion, which marriage partner will prevail, finding a mate to relieve loneliness, winning a lawsuit, impressing a church board, earning God's approval, or having the perfect career. The battle is about trust, patience, self-control, integrity, honesty and godliness. It is all about facing our fears. Our goal is to possess Christ and let Christ possess us.

If we are not clear on our purpose, then we will get lost. World War II is a time that is remembered with honor and dignity. That war was universally seen as a fight against evil and oppression. There was a clear purpose for the fight, and a decisive outcome. The Vietnam War, on the other hand, was always muddled with confusion. The men who fought there remember that war as a brutal and merciless conflict. But as a nation, we did not have a clear sense of purpose for fighting in Southeast Asia. Our soldiers were confused as to why they were even there. There was not a clear beginning or end to the conflict.

Having a clear purpose is key in any war. So the question that arises is, What will it take to possess the land? Our first thought might be of sharp minds and strong muscles, but not according to the Psalms. Here we receive the great insight that it is not by might or strength that we will possess the land, but by attending to our relationship with God.

Listen to what the psalmist says about possessing the land: "Who is the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way he should choose. His soul will abide in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land" (Ps. 25:12-13).

Psalm 37 has four references regarding what it takes to possess the land: "For evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land" (Ps. 37:9).

"But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity" (Ps. 37:11). Jesus formed the third beatitude from this verse.

"For those blessed by Him will inherit the land; but those cursed by Him will be cut off" (Ps. 37:22).

"The righteous will inherit the land, and dwell in it forever" (Ps. 37:29).

The psalms say that we possess the land by fearing the Lord, waiting on him, being humble, receiving his blessings, and being righteous.

Here is the second truth we learn from these verses: The result of possessing the land is to enter God's rest.

The word "rest" appears in verses 13 and 15. Like the words "give" and "possess," "rest" is a covenant term, a word with deep theological significance. The root speaks of not only the absence of movement, but of being settled in a place; it has overtones of finality, victo-

ry, and salvation. Rest is described by God as “His rest.” It is a place granted by God where there is peace and respite from enemies and the promise of the cessation of sorrow and toil in the future. Rest is a place where Yahweh will “plant” his people, where they will live without fear of being disturbed ever again.

After six days of creation, God rested. He gave the Sabbath as a reminder to us to cease from our work and to wait on him. In Joshua, rest was associated with entering the land and dispossessing enemies. The two-and-one-half tribes had entered into rest, now they were to help the other tribes enter into their rest. In the book of Judges, when enemies were subdued, the land would be said to be “at rest.”

In the New Testament, we discover that that rest is found in Christ. Jesus said, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30). Here is what the writer of Hebrews says about this subject of rest, “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. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His” (Heb. 4:8-10).

Isn't this what we are really seeking? We want a home where we are at peace, a secure place where we can feel content and whole. What we are doing is trying to recapture the Garden of Eden. We long for the new heavens and the new earth. But we can enter right now into the rest that is in Christ. He is the place where we stop striving for love and acceptance, stop running from fears and self-hatred and stop trying to satisfy the deep hungers of our souls.

The interesting thing, however, is that we have rest not by escaping war, but by going into battle. We can't remain passive. We can't ignore the threats caused by heartache and addiction. We have to be honest, strong and courageous and willing to face these things. But then we cease from fighting, and we worship. We find rest in Christ, and we look forward to ultimate rest at his coming.

There is a third principle here which involves community: An essential element in possessing the land is for all Israel to fight together.

Verse 2 emphasizes “all this people.” A very important exchange occurs between Joshua and the two-and-one-half tribes that settled east of the Jordan. Joshua reminds these people of the promise they made to Moses to help their brothers when they entered the land.

When Israel defeated Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and Og, the king of Bashan, across the Jordan, Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh wanted that land for their inheritance (Numbers 32). Moses was very angry with them for making this request, because he felt that granting this would discourage Israel from entering Canaan (just as when the twelve spies entered the land and ten of them reported the discouraging news that there were giants inhabiting that place). Moses did grant this land as an inheritance, but he made these two-and-one-half tribes promise to enter the land with Israel and fight with them. They would not return until the enemies were defeated. What these tribes were asking for was second best. The lesson is clear: If we want to settle for second best, God will accommodate us.

It was crucial that all Israel enter the land together. Community is a central theme in Joshua. Throughout this book, the community of Israel fights together and worships together. We will see that all Israel crosses the Jordan, all Israel is circumcised, all Israel celebrates the Passover, all Israel walks around Jericho, all Israel suffers when Achan sins, all Israel reads Deuteronomy at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. This points out the truth that all Israel is designed to experience life together in the land.

Community is essential for possessing this life in Christ, and it is essential for going to war against the enemies in the land. But this important element to our warfare is often missing in our day and age. We were never intended to fight this war alone. It is to be waged by the people of God against the enemies of God. There is tremendous fear in being alone, but great encouragement in being together. This is why there is great value in being part of a community where there are real relationships and honest sharing, one in which there is healthy confrontation, supportive encouragement and a commitment to pray for each other. When part of the community is missing or is involved in sin, then the whole suffers. What happens to you affects me; my sin and my struggles affect you. All too often the problem we have in warfare is trying to go it alone. This is what Paul implies in Ephesians when he says that the whole body is growing into a mature man, “being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part” (Eph. 4:16).

Here then are three more truths that will help us prepare for war: The purpose for the war is to possess our life in Christ; the result of possessing the land is to enter into rest; and an honest and healthy community of which we can be a part is essential to our life in Christ.

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