

**SERMON – 25/8/24**  
**'God's Generosity'**

Joshua 1:1-9

“Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the River Jordan into the land I am about to give to them.” (Joshua 1:2)

I am always exhilarated to begin a new sermon series, and this morning is no exception. The study of God's Word is exciting because it is living and active and you never quite know where God will lead you when you start to read and to ponder what is written. With exhilaration, of course, also comes trepidation as I recognise that there is always far more that could be said than we will have time for, and that I have a responsibility to ensure that what I focus on week by week is going to be edifying and helpful to as wide a spectrum of people as possible as we all seek to grow as disciples of Jesus and live lives of increasing dedication to God and to the work of His Kingdom.

So, as we dive in to this Book of Joshua this morning, let me begin by giving a bit of background to ensure that we read it in its context and interpret its message correctly in our time.

The date is around 1200 BC. As we saw this time last year, some 600 years earlier, the promise had been give to Abraham in his old age that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the grains of sand on the seashore, and that the land of Canaan would be their inheritance. The family of Abraham's grandson, Jacob, had gone down to Egypt during a time of famine and had become settled and prosperous there to such an extent that they were posing a threat to Pharaoh and the security of his kingdom. Fierce persecution arose and the people of Israel were enslaved, but having heard their cries the Lord raised up Moses to lead them to freedom, which he did through the amazing events we know as the Exodus. After the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai and the long march through the wilderness, sustained by manna from heaven, the scene was set for the occupation of the Promised Land. But... there's always a but, isn't there... Moses sent one leader from each of the Twelve Tribes to go and spy out the land, which they raved about when they returned – it's a land flowing with milk and honey – but of

the twelve, ten argued that they *shouldn't* advance because the inhabitants of the land were like giants. Only the other two, Caleb and Joshua, tried to persuade the people to have faith in God's promise and to go in and occupy the land, but the majority prevailed. The majority are not always right, of course, and the upshot was that the whole people of Israel spent the next 40 years wandering in the wilderness until eventually only Moses, Caleb and Joshua were left of the adults who had disobeyed God and turned back from taking the Land when God had first offered it to them.

Moses was given to see the Promised Land again from a distance from the top of Mount Nebo before he died but not to *enter* it. There he would lay his hand upon Joshua as his successor and Joshua would be anointed by the Spirit of God as the one who will lead the People of Israel into Canaan. Here begins that story.

Now at a time when these same square miles of land are being fought over yet again, it's really important to say at this point that the message of this Book of Joshua is addressed not in physical terms to the contemporary state of Israel but in spiritual terms to those who in Christ are seeking the Kingdom of God – that is to say to you and me as we leave behind us a life of slavery to sin (in whatever Egypt we are trapped in) and as we leave behind us the disobedience of whatever wilderness we have each chosen in preference to God's way, and as we step into a new framework for living where, although we will still face struggles and obstacles we will be where God intends us to be in a place where we will be ready to receive the fulfilment of the promises He has made to us in Christ.

So this morning I want you to think of yourself standing with the promises of God lying before you and the call of God ringing in your ears to 'get ready' to receive what the Lord is about to give you. The instructions Joshua is given here and the leadership he gives in turn are as valid and helpful for us today in our Christian pilgrimage as they were for the people of God more than three thousand years ago. And that's what I'd like to consider with you this morning as we look ahead to a new session.

The first point to make is that just as Israel's journey was leading them to the Promised Land, so also *our* journey is taking us into the promises of God. The aimless wilderness days of wandering are past: "Now then, says the Lord to Joshua, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan river into the land I am about to give you... I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses... No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them." (Joshua 1:2-6) What formidable promises to take hold of, all based on God's generosity – His willingness to give – and what a sense of excitement and anticipation, albeit with trepidation, must have been around in the Israelite camp.

Where is that sense of excitement and anticipation with *us* I wonder? Where even is the trepidation a lot of the time? I don't think most of us are conscious on a day-to-day basis of being on a spiritual journey at all, far less that we're journeying into the promises of God. Can we not grasp that with excitement each new day and rise to journey with God into all that he has in store for us? Peace that passes all understanding, life in all its fullness, growth in grace and in the likeness of Christ, the fellowship of the family of God, more and more and more - and at the end of this life's journey, the indescribable glory of the living presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, everlastingly. Does that not excite you? Are you journeying into the promises of God? What a tremendous destination lies ahead of us!

Of course that's not to say that the journey will be easy, because, exciting though it certainly is, it is a journey against the flow of the world around us, just as the journey of the Israelites was into the Promised Land of Canaan, where there would be opposition. For us there will be knocks and bumps as we come up against those people and things which oppose the purposes of God, but the purposes of God will prevail, the promises of God will be fulfilled, and in the midst of it all through thick and thin, as the Lord says again and again to Joshua in this passage, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor

forsake you... the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

In Christ, our journey is into the fulfilment of the promises of God, with that same promise of God's presence with us as our assurance along the way.

The other point to make, is that just as Joshua was instructed to make God's Law his constant guide, so are we called to journey under the authority of the Word of God. "Be strong and very courageous, God says to Joshua. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." (Joshua 1:7-8) Our success on the spiritual journey through life and on the outworking of that spirituality in our daily actions depends on our adherence to God's Word just as much as the physical journey is dependent on the road map and the direction sign if it is to be successfully concluded.

Joshua is encouraged to do three things with God's Law, and the same things hold true for us. Firstly, he is told not to let the Book of the Law depart from his mouth - it is to be the basis for all that he has to say as leader of God's people. It is to be there all the time, not just as an occasional reference book to consult when he finds himself lost or confused on the journey, because secondly, God commands him to meditate on it day and night - God's Word is to be his constant nourishment, the foundation for all that he is and all that he does. And thirdly, he is not only to meditate on it and speak it forth - he is to be careful to do everything it says so that he might prosper and be successful. He is to be a man of integrity, a complete man - thinking, saying, doing what God Himself thinks and says and does.

We cannot say that the journey is too hard for us or that we don't know the way to take - for the way is clearly shown to us and nourishment for the journey is generously given to us in this book of God's Word. Yet how slow we are to take it up, how reluctant we are to wrestle with its message and grow up into Christ, and

consequently how much we wander to the right and to the left, how unsuccessful we are and how little we seem to prosper because our ears and hearts are not open to the One who has shown us the everlasting way.

As we set off into a new session in the life of the church that will see significant changes and an as-yet-uncertain path, how sure are you of your spiritual direction? How confident are you of the promises of God? How central is the Word of God to your thoughts, your speech, your deeds?

“Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the River Jordan into the land I am about to give to them.” (Joshua 1:2)

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)