



October 24 & 25, 2015
St. Andrews Sunday
Pastor Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

The Story: Finding the Scarlet Thread
The Battle Begins
Numbers & Deuteronomy

We are continuing in our journey through the Story. How many read chapter 6? Let's review: God came to Abram and made some promises. What? He would make of him a great nation. They would bless the world. And one more thing: What? Land. A land of their own! "Go to the land that I will show you." There was a 430 year detour in Egypt, but God hadn't forgotten his promise and, through Moses, set his people his people free. But almost from their first moment of freedom... those people whined! They whined about everything. And the final straw came when the spies returned from the Promised Land whining about the big giants who lived there. It would be too hard!

But not all of them... two spies said, "What are you talking about? With God's help, we can do this!" They were Caleb and Joshua, Moses' successor. By the way, here's another glimpse of the Scarlet Thread: do you know how to pronounce Joshua in NT Greek? Jesus! Yeshua. But Joshua gives us a glimpse of a different Jesus, described, not in the gospels, but in Revelation 19. The Conquering Rider on the White Horse with a sword coming from his mouth. The Warrior Jesus who will destroy evil and set up his Kingdom on earth. The Book of Joshua gives us a glimpse of Jesus in the end times!

Anyway, after all the whining about how hard the Promised Land would be, God says, "Fine. Because of your unbelief, none of you will ever set foot in the Promised Land... except for Joshua and Caleb." And that's what happened. Forty more years passed until every last whiner had breathed his last. Only then was God ready to fulfill a promise—the promise of the Land—made nearly 500 years earlier.

And now we come to a new generation. I call them the Children of the Wilderness—the great kids raised by whiners. They were too young to remember the miracles in Egypt. They did remember the miraculous Manna because they lived on it, but they remembered how their parents whined about that, too. These ungrateful complainers were a terrible example to their kids. And worst of all, they withheld the most precious sign that these children belonged to Yahweh: circumcision. Those who lived in Egypt had been circumcised, but not the Children of the Wilderness. Imagine! It would be like withholding our sign of the covenant, baptism, from our own children.

But now the whiners are dust and God renews his covenant with the Children of the Wilderness. First, as you will read, he gives them their own Exodus. He parts the Jordan River so they can cross over on dry land just like their parents did 40 years earlier. Finally, they are standing on the Promised Land! Then, Joshua orders every man circumcised. It must have been a pretty quiet camp for a few days. (Aren't you guys glad we don't require that for membership here?) And finally, the Manna stops! No more free food. If they are going to survive, they are going to have to eat from the fruit of the land flowing with milk and honey.

There's just one problem; the land is occupied with a whole list of tribes: the Canaanites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Perizzites... the Stalactites, the Stalagmites. And they aren't interested in sharing their land with the Hebrews. If the Jews want the Land, they're going to have to take it and that won't be a cakewalk. All of these "ites" were wicked people who did things that made ISIS look like Boy Scouts. Frankly, as you read, you will find some of these stories of conquest pretty brutal. But it is a reminder that we serve a holy God who will one day render judgment on every evil thing on his earth. (By the way, it will be better to meet Jesus the Savior than Jesus the Warrior!)

So, the first stop in the new Land was Jericho. Jericho is the oldest city in the world, the lowest city in the world, and it was formidable. The outer walls were 6 feet thick; the inner walls 12 feet thick; bristling with guards. And as Joshua and his people look on at this daunting sight, God says something very interesting: "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands..."

Notice, this is past tense. "I have already delivered Jericho into your hands." What would your response be? "Ummm, not really. They are there behind the walls. We are outside the walls. No, Lord, you really haven't delivered Jericho into our hands!" But Joshua listens as God lays out the plans. And, frankly, he might have thought, "This is the craziest battle plan I've ever heard." Listen:

Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.

As crazy as it must have sounded, they did what God said. For six days, they marched around Jericho, carrying the ark and blowing trumpets. Then they returned to camp. Can you imagine watching this from the walls of Jericho? The first day was Defcon One; every man bracing for attack from these Jews and their powerful God, but it never came. The next morning was same thing... ready for the

attack, but nothing. By days three, and four and five and six they're laughing, mocking, mooning them, because it is obvious these Jews aren't any threat at all. Then comes day seven:

On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner...The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.

You remember the Negro Spiritual that describes this, right? "Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho. Joshua fit the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumblin' down." When I did youth ministry, we sang that song with a little kick to it. "Down, down, down, down, down, down be doo bee."

This battle shaped the Children of the Wilderness for the rest of their lives. It was the first of many cities to be taken. In every case, it was the same formula: God "gave" them the city, but they still had to fight to claim what God had promised. I wonder, how many here have failed to take possession of the promises of God in your life, because you think you can sit back and wait for God to hand them to you on a silver platter? The greatest promises in life still require us to risk, work, fight, bleed, and even fail at times. That is how God grows us. That is how he shapes us. And that is how we keep from becoming spoiled children—like the wilderness whiners, who never had to work for anything and ended up taking God's incredible goodness for granted.

I think this generation—the Children of the Wilderness—may be the most faithful in the Old Testament; the Bible's equivalent of the "Greatest Generation" that fought and won World War II for us. They had bumps along the way, but unlike their parents—and sadly, unlike the generations that followed—for forty faithful years they trusted God, obeyed him, fought, and finally claimed a big chunk of the Promised Land.

In the last chapter Joshua gives one more speech. He is 110 years old; his life is about over. For 70 years, he has led God's people as they fought one hard battle after another. Now, in his final speech, he reminds them of God's faithfulness and ends with a benediction:

Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness.... But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living.... But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.

Forty faithful years, and yet Joshua was looking to the next generation. These are words of legacy. Every person here will leave some kind of legacy. Good or bad. The question is, how do we leave a legacy like this... like Joshua's? Where we can say, "I don't care what everyone else does, I don't care what direction our country goes, I don't care if our government and our courts abandon thousands of years of moral tradition, as for me and my house we will serve the Lord." You know how it is possible for Joshua to say this in the last chapter of the book? Because of what God said to him in the first chapter. Listen:

Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them...³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses...⁵ No one will be able to stand up 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.⁶ Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.⁷ Be strong and very courageous. 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...⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

Do you hear a theme? Be strong and courageous. Three times God repeats these words. "Be strong in obeying the law I have given you, be courageous as you fight the battles before you. Be strong and courageous, and if you are, you will be successful and prosperous." Forty faithful years later these people had a foothold in the Promised Land, because they did what God told them. They were strong in their obedience, they were courageous and God blessed them. Strong and courageous.

So is that the key? If I work hard at being a good person, if I am an obedient keeper of religious rules, if I screw up my courage, dig down deep, is that how I leave a noble legacy? Some people think so. Lots of Christians do. "My legacy is dependent upon my being a good and brave person." But if you think that, you have missed the five most important words in God's speech. "I will be with you!" God repeats himself in 9: "Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

It is the living presence of glorious God that allows us to leave a noble legacy. I am not strong and courageous because I decide to be. I can be strong and courageous when I remember that no matter what I face the Lord God Yahweh is with me wherever I go! And oh, this week how we need to remember this promise!

In a moment we will read the names of our departed friends and family. Every name has a legacy. And it is a mixed bag. For some, their legacy is one of missed opportunity, of selfishness, of stinginess, of infidelity, of a life stolen by alcohol, of kids who never felt loved, of spouses never treasured. But there are other names you will read who were like Joshua. Not perfect but faithful, strong, courageous,

obedient, powerful. Their household was marked by their witness. Not because they tried hard to be good people, but because they believed that the Lord was with them. Because they allowed the Holy Spirit to change them; because they were transformed, day by day, year by year, from one battle to the next into the image of Christ.

I know the legacy I want to leave. I want children and grandchildren and great grandchildren who love Jesus. I want a wife who felt my love and adoration. I want a church that experienced my faithful service and generosity. I want disciples for Jesus whom I have made, who are making other disciples for Jesus. I want Gig Harbor to be more like the Promised Land and less like Egypt—that's what I hope will be my legacy. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." What about you?