

Be Not Afraid. Be Not Very Afraid.  
Joshua 1:1-9

We're in the second part of our series on "Standing Strong". We need to stand strong in these difficult times we're in. This is quite unprecedented. As some news reporters say, nothing like this has ever happened before in modern times. It is quite unique. As of this morning, almost 700,000 people have been infected around the world. In the US, the number now stands at 124,000 plus. Meanwhile, deaths are mounting here in the US and in Europe. Worldwide, deaths have been recorded at a staggering figure of almost 32,000. 6% of that is from the US.

This is like a nightmare. And we're living it. It's not a movie. It's for real. It has turned our world, both personal, and global, upside down. And people are afraid. People are scared. No one wants to venture out. Even doctors say they are afraid. Last night, I remarked casually to my wife that because of all the emotional, physical, and mental hardships that our health workers are going through, perhaps many young people are now having second thoughts about entering the medical field. And she said, "That's true. In fact, my niece in the Philippines who is in first year college and dreaming of becoming a doctor is now thinking of switching courses." That's the tragedy of this tragedy. It is affecting even our perspective in life.

No doubt, this is another defining moment for this nation. This country has gone through a lot of crises before, the revolution, the civil war, the 1918 flu pandemic, the Great Depression, the two world wars, those were difficult times but this country has always emerged stronger than before. It has overcome insurmountable odds. In the same way, I'd like to encourage you, if you're feeling afraid or weak, you can also emerge stronger than before. This could also be a defining moment for you. It could either break you or make you.

But hear these words, “Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not break”. Another one says, “Be a warrior, not a worrier”.

And so, this morning, I’ve entitled this message, “Be Not Afraid. Be Not Very Afraid”. I want us to look at the moment when Moses, the leader of the Israelites, died and God called a man, who was feeling afraid and nervous, to replace Moses. This man was Joshua.

If you have your Bibles with you, please turn with me to Joshua 1. This will be projected on the screen but I want you to lay open before you that passage in the Bible because I’m going to refer to that passage every now and then. For now, look at the screen and we’re going to read this alternately. So, I’ll start with the verse 1 then you read verse 2 and we alternate. Let’s read.

(Read Joshua 1:1-9)

So, let me give you a background. Moses died before entering the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. The Israelites have to cross the Jordan River to drive away the pagan nations in order to possess the land and so, the Israelites needed a new leader. The mantle of leadership was passed on naturally to Joshua being the assistant of Moses. Joshua had been Moses’ right hand man for a long time so he was chosen by God early on.

I’m sure Joshua knew that the time will come for him to lead the Israelites but it seems like he wasn’t prepared for this. He probably was thinking that Moses would not leave him soon and that the former was going to lead them to Canaan. But God had other plans. He took Moses prematurely and suddenly Joshua felt like he was not ready. You see, Joshua was a warrior. In fact, he fought many battles before. But, as a leader, he was untested. He relied mainly on Moses. And mind you, Joshua was almost 90 years-old at this time. Which tells us that fear is not a respecter of age. Fear can strike anyone anytime. Now, God wanted him to stand strong as a leader. He wanted him to rely on God alone.

Sometimes, God has to work that way in our lives. Maybe we've been relying too much on something or someone. Maybe even on our own selves. Maybe we have put God aside and called on him only during an emergency. So, sometimes he takes away something from us that has become our security blanket in order for us to seek refuge in him.

But note, when God put Joshua in this challenging situation, he also encouraged him with these words, "Be strong and courageous" in this passage. Three times! Verses 6, 7, and 9. Just for emphasis. In case Joshua missed it. So, Joshua must be pretty afraid. He was stepping out of his comfort zone. Now, he must walk in faith. But God is faithful. He never left him nor forsook him.

So, in verse 2, God says matter-of-factly, "Moses my servant is dead". He's saying to Joshua, "Leave Moses behind. It's no good to be thinking of the past. Don't look back". Just to make Joshua realize that he must drop his attachment to the past. Because God has given him a new assignment. And the assignment is in the rest of the verse, "Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites."

God now wants him to take a step of faith. As I said last week, fear is our enemy but the enemy of fear is faith. And faith conquers fear.

This morning, are you fearful? Do you feel anxious? Are there feelings of uncertainty inside of you? Are you afraid to take a step of faith? Be not afraid, God says. Be not very afraid.

This morning, I'd like to share with you **three principles to conquer fear in your life**. Especially during this coronavirus crisis, I believe these principles can help you navigate the sea of uncertainty facing you.

Why should you be not afraid? Because

**1. God's Promise is Your Sure Victory.**

Joshua was a great warrior and he had won victories in battle. But he knew that the battles he would fight after crossing the Jordan River would dwarf all the battles he fought in the past. But God made him strong. Look how many promises God gave him in this passage:

“I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. 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.” (vs. 3-6)

How many do you see? I counted at least six. It’s like God saying to you, “Just obey my instructions and this is what I promise you. I’ll give you a beautiful wife. Three wonderful children, two cars, white and red, a house with a large backyard, a loving church with supportive members, and a white hair”. All of these came true! The last one is true although right now it doesn’t seem like. That’s the magic of modern technology.

So, when Joshua received those promises from God, I’m sure he was emboldened. He knew that God keeps his promises always. And, of course, all those promises of God were fulfilled in the lifetime of Joshua.

God is the great promise-keeper. He never breaks a promise. We can depend on his promises for they are absolutely reliable. A promise from God is a statement we can depend on with absolute confidence.

Someone said, “God’s promises will not break if you lean on them.”<sup>1</sup> Samuel 15:29 declares, “He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not man, that he should change his mind.”

God is not fickle-minded like many of us. He is committed to his commitments. When he said he will never leave you nor forsake you, which he promised Joshua, mind you, that's what he means exactly. He'll stand by you in whatever circumstances. Sometimes we may feel that he isn't there. But he is there even though we may not see him. The important thing is that we don't depend on our feelings. But on the promises of God.

Why does God fulfill his promises? It all stems from the fact that God is faithful. Over and over the Bible tells us that God is faithful. Look at some of the verses that talk about God's faithfulness.

“Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22-24)

“Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.” (Deut. 7:9)

“Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.” (Psalm 36:5)

God's promise is your sure victory. That's the first principle. The second is this.

## 2. God's Word is Your Safe Guide.

Now, let's look at verses 7 and 8, “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. 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.”

Here the Lord is saying, “Joshua, if you want to be successful, there's one thing you need to know. You've got to be faithful to the Book of the Law.”

What is this Book of the Law? This Book of the Law refers to the Torah or the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible which we have now. These books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Those are the only ones that comprised the written Word of God after the death of Moses. And before Joshua died, he wrote a book which was completed by Eleazar the High Priest and was added after Deuteronomy.

Now, if you're a new Christian or maybe you're not a Christian and you happen to have a Bible app on your phone and the first five books are not listed as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy but instead, 1 Chronicles, 1 Corinthians, 1 John, 1 Kings, and 1 Peter, don't be confused. What you have is the Bible listed in alphabetical order. That's ok because it makes it user-friendly. But it's not ok for me. I disagree with that arrangement. You see, there's a reason why the books in the Bible are arranged in a certain way. And I won't get into that right now. The thing is if those before us thought that there was no significance in the way that the Bible was arranged, they would have arranged the Bible alphabetically as well, whether it was written in Hebrew, Greek, or English or whatever language, just so it would be user-friendly. In fact, I can think of a reason why it's not really user-friendly. Imagine a preacher going, "Now, let's turn to the last book of the Bible." You go to your app and what do you find? Zephaniah instead of Revelation. You see, there's a purpose why the books of the Bible are arranged in a certain way. Arranging it alphabetically loses the significance. And if you want to know the significance, come to our Class 201 which we're conducting in the next two weeks, online.

Anyway, going back to the Book of the Law, so the Book of the Law is the Word of God at the time of Joshua. And then, books were added to it and it became the Old Testament.

And Jesus came and after he went to heaven, his disciples wrote some books as well which became the New Testament and then in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Christian leaders came together and put the Old Testament and the New Testament together which has been passed on to us and which we now call the Bible or the Word of God. This now is synonymous to the Book of the Law that Joshua had during his day.

Now, God wanted Joshua to observe the commandments of God as set forth in his word. In fact, God wants him to study his word, to meditate on his word, to practice everything in his word. Why? Because it will safely guide him in his way of thinking, in the way he speaks, and in his attitudes. It will be the foundation of his life. A foundation that will give him a solid footing in his career and life.

If it was true during his time, it is also true in our time. We must apply this principle the way Joshua did. Without the Word of God to guide us, we will not find success in life.

Psalm 111:7-8 says, “The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.” Precepts mean commandments. The Hebrew word used is **Dabar** which means to lead, to guide, to drive as flocks to pasture. David says, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.” From this we can see that God gives us his commandments for our own good. So that we may walk on the straight and narrow way. So that we may find joy and comfort in our journey.

“We all like sheep have gone astray,” Isaiah 53:6 says. So, we need God to direct our paths. And he does this through his word. He loves us so much that he doesn’t want any of us to go astray. The precepts we found in his word are there as signposts for us to follow so that we may not lose our way.

The Ten Commandments are there, for example, to show us how we can honor God, our parents, and our neighbors. In the New Testament, we find some more instructions from the Lord Jesus and some of his apostles about how we should conduct our lives.

Psalm 19: 8 says, “The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.”

Now that we are all in isolation, we have a lot of time in our hands. This is an opportunity for us to get closer to God through his Word. As we get closer to him, this will dispel our fears and worries. That is what it did for Joshua. That’s why he had great success in the daunting task God had given him.

You see, the Bible is a guiding light for us in this present dark and gloomy world. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”

God speaks to us through his Word. When we need guidance, he will make us remember Scriptures we have read and meditated on and it will feel like he is speaking to us through a still, small voice. Isaiah says, “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.” (Isaiah 30:21)

God’s promise is my sure victory. God’s Word is my safe guide. And thirdly,

3. God’s presence is my sustaining power.

The very last phrase in verse 9 which God said to Joshua is this, “...for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

That’s very comforting, isn’t it? God didn’t only give his promise. God didn’t only give him his Word. God also gave him the assurance of his presence. That tells me that God is a personal God.

In the world of Joshua, there were so many pagan gods. There were the gods of the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Amorites and all the ites you can think of.

But none of these gods were personal as the God of Israel. All pagan gods were distant. Their worshippers, in fact, were afraid of them. They even made human sacrifices to them because their gods were angry gods and cruel gods and demanding gods. All these gods, of course, were not real. They were just man-made and as such, were a reflection of human traits and character.

But the God of Israel is so different. He is not whimsical and unpredictable. His love is constant. He is compassionate and loving.

Psalm 86:15 says, “But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”

In Jeremiah 31:3, it also says, “The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”

It is this love that prompted God to go with Joshua wherever he went. He was dear to his heart. He understood Joshua’s feelings of fear and anxiety. And he wished to allay his fears by assuring him that he was nearby, that he was always watching over him. Just like when you are dating. You want to be with your loved one always. You follow him or her. Because there’s such a thrill when you’re together. There’s electricity. Because you love that person. But, right now, I know it’s painful because of social distancing. You have to settle with FB, Instagram, what-have-you.

For those of you who are not dating anymore, or who date once in a blue moon, I hope that electricity is still there. I hope you’ll take this time to really just rekindle your love for each other. I hope you’re singing, “Lalalalala, Close to you” and not “Please release me, let me go.”

Now, in verse 10, we read, “So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ‘Go through the camp and tell the people, “Get your provisions ready. Three days

from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own.”””

In my mind, I can picture Joshua suddenly straightening up, you know, like someone infused with new courage and strength and becoming confident and shouting orders, “Go through the camp and tell the people, blah, blah, blah”. And if you continue reading the passage till the end, he keeps on giving orders like a man possessed by the Spirit of God.

That’s what happens when you have the assurance of God’s presence in your life. Remember, the Bible says, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31) No one, nothing, can stand against you if God is with you.

Let me close this message by asking, “Are you sure that God is for you?” You may say, “Well, yes, God is for me” How do you know that? “Well, because I grew up in a religious home. I go to church. I try to be a good person. I obey him as much as I can.”

Those are good answers but not quite correct when measured against what the Bible says regarding what it takes to really know for sure that God is for you. You see, to make sure of that you have to know who really God is. God has been revealed to us by his Son Jesus. Jesus came to earth to show us the Father. In fact, Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”

The way to know God the Father is through Jesus. God sent his Son Jesus to earth because he loves us so much. The Bible says that we are all sinners condemned to die and be separated from God forever. But the Bible says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

If you’re watching or listening and you want to receive the gift of eternal life, all you need to do is to believe in what Jesus has done for you.

Jesus died on the cross for your sins. Many people are fearful and anxious because of sin in their lives. They don't know how to get rid of the guilt and the shame and the sorrow that sins bring. Jesus came to take away those sins. He carried your sins and nailed them on the cross. He shed his blood so that you can be forgiven of your sins.

If you acknowledge what Jesus has done for you, come to him and receive him in your heart as your personal Lord and Savior. And you will be saved from your sins. And he will give you eternal life.

Jesus is a type of Joshua. In fact, their names mean the same thing. Jehovah saves. The similarity doesn't end there. Because like Joshua who fought earthly evil armies in order to bring the Israelites into the Promised Land with physical borders, Jesus battled the spiritual forces of evil to usher God's people into heaven, the ultimate Promised Land, which has no borders.

So, would you come to Jesus this afternoon?