

Numbers 14:8-9, Joshua 1:1-9, Matthew 14:22-33

We have reached the end of Exodus. How much we have learned about God in this study! I hate to come to the end. But, in the Bible, we always find that the end is really just the beginning. It seemed last week when Israel was paralyzed with fear and left wandering in the desert for 40 years that it was over. But it's never over with God. With God there is always hope.

Moses is now at the end of his life. Graciously God took him to the top of a mountain so he can see the land. God points out all the landmarks to Moses. God knows every little piece of the land; it was a special place, filled with abundance. God's promise was chief on God's mind, and once again God was on the move to make it happen. Let's listen to the story. It picks up with Joshua.

Now Joshua had been in the land 40 years before, as one of the initial spies. He realized what a wonderful blessing the land was. Here is what he said back then to the people of Israel. READ Nu 14:8-9.

So this is Joshua's paradigm. He believed the promise of God. He also recognized that fear paralyzes and so he tried to help the people trust God. He was a man willing to risk God's presence, power, and grace. That's the kind of man he was and that's why he was chosen to lead.

During the forty years in the desert it wasn't like nothing was happening. Even when Israel suffered the consequences of wandering in the desert, God continued to strengthen and teach them. When people attacked them, God faithfully defended them, just as God had done in Egypt. God prepared them for the day when they would enter the land. Finally that day came. Let's hear the story. READ Josh 1:1-5

The promise is not dead or compromised one bit. God had already given the land. It was a done deal. God never gives up; there's no way to break God's grace. No matter how bad things get, God is faithful. And, God faithfully moved forward, choosing a new leader for Israel, a leader who would help the Israelites stay faithful.

Faith matters to God. Hebrews tells us it was by faith that this promise was eventually obtained. God approves and rewards those who have faith (Heb 11).

Having faith means you recognize:

- **God is faithful.** God does not renege on promises. God does not wake up in the morning abandoning God's plans. God will never give up on the purpose God has for this people.
- **God is with us.** Martin Luther said: "Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times."

That sounds simple enough. So why do we struggle? Perhaps we are like my granddaughter. She's three and loves to swim. So we bought her a swim vest, which she named Miss Mermaid. We put it on her and told her it would help her float. We got in the water, but she clung to me for dear life. Arms and legs completely wrapped around me, it felt like we were one. So much for Miss Mermaid; she had no power. We urged my granddaughter to jump in, assuring her she

would not go under. No way! For days we put on Miss Mermaid but the swim vest was completely useless to her because this child did not believe.

Then one day as we got in the pool, once again wearing Miss Mermaid, arms and legs wrapped around me, and my granddaughter suddenly let go. She let go of me and just floated in the water! She couldn't believe it! It worked! It was fun! She laid back and put her feet in the air. She squealed with absolute delight. This was the greatest! We couldn't get her out of the water. She had by herself decided to trust Miss Mermaid and Miss Mermaid was faithful. What joy! She trusted; Miss Mermaid came through.

Have you learned to trust God's faithfulness?

God explains Himself in this way: "I will be with you; I will not forsake you or fail you." Do you trust it?

God's biggest problem is not Himself, but us. We find it hard to trust God. But, amazingly, God is so gracious and loving that God will help us stand. God does not give up on us, nor does God change the plan because we fail. The gift was still there. Listen to the call. READ Josh 1:6-9

God says to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous." This is not a call about how to fight a war. God is not telling Joshua, "It's up to you to courageously go into the land, fight, and win the battle." Rather it's a call to trust and depend upon the Lord, who will fight the battle. The words mean "be courageous in faith; be strong in your belief." Trust the gift has been given.

Let's take the story of Peter walking on the water. Peter said, "Lord tell me to come to you on the water." And Jesus gave Peter permission. "Come on!" Once permission was granted, the promise was secure. Peter would walk on water. Peter had to "be strong and courageous" in belief. Peter had to trust the words enough to get out of the boat.

Nothing except faith could make it happen.

It wasn't dependent on whether Peter was athletic; had surfing experience or not; was light on his feet. Peter had to have only one thing: trust in Jesus. How is your trust? Have you tried it lately? Perhaps you will find joy when you do!

The Israelites' receipt of the land does not depend on their own human strength and courage. It depends on their trust in God, who had already chosen to capture and give Canaan to them. They had to believe the promise, as opposed to falling back into the paralyzing fear that they couldn't do it.

So how do we overcome fear? The first principle is **Trust God**.

God gave Joshua a second piece of advice. God told him, "Be careful to act in accordance with the law. Read it, mull it over every day, just like you are doing with the One Year Bible; for then you shall have success."

The second principle for overcoming fear is **Obey God's Word**. Let it shape the way you live. The implications to these principles are profound.

We are not to focus on the battle per se. It's not our strength that wins. The conquest is for God to worry about. What we need to be concerned with is trusting God's promises and being devoted to God's law.

Now you might say, but we are not controlled by the law; we live by grace and faith in Jesus Christ. And yes, you are absolutely right. However, remember, the law points to Jesus. Remember all the symbolism in the Exodus for Jesus? Like . . . the Passover, in which the lamb's blood would save . . . and the water from the rock, which is Christ, and the bread from heaven that nourished the people in the desert? The law is fulfilled in Jesus. What does Jesus say? Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. By His own life Jesus demonstrates how to trust and obey God.

All accomplishments for God must flow from a heart full of devotion.

So God's call is to "not be afraid, but trust." The call is to overcome fear by "devoting ourselves to God first, according to the law."

In the year 1506, Martin Luther embarked on a call, only he didn't know it for a long time. Motivated by fear, he became a monk at age 22 after nearly being struck by lightning. But he struggled because he feared God. It caused him such anguish that he hated God, because he believed he couldn't be good enough. But God worked with him on his fear, leading him to a place where he could overcome it.

Because of his struggles his superiors gave him leave from the monastery and he was sent to the University of Wittenberg to obtain a doctorate in theology. While studying the Bible one day, he suddenly realized a relationship with God wasn't about how good he was; it was all about faith. He realized that Jesus himself had experienced the same desolation while on the cross and that Jesus understood the agony he felt. Jesus was with him, not hating his failure, but loving him. He also read in Romans: "The just shall live by faith." Luther's fear began to melt away, replaced by great hope. He became absolutely elated; a joy-filled believer; and his new perspective spread throughout the faculty at the University of Wittenberg.

We all know the story about Martin Luther and his 95 theses and the Reformation that came out of it. Luther's call wasn't a onetime specific call that he understood ahead of time, but rather his call kind of unfolded, requiring him to take continual steps of faith. It wasn't always easy. Sometimes his life was even in danger. Each step of the way Martin Luther was challenged to be courageous and rely on God's presence, power, and help. And God saw him through, helping many people to learn to live by faith and to read and follow God's Word.

Martin Luther said, "Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times." Aren't we glad for people who are willing to believe God? Aren't we thankful for a God who overcomes our fears with the call to trust Him and obey?

So sure is God's faithfulness that here you and I are today, following God ourselves, growing as disciples, striving to learn how to live by faith. We must never fear. Jesus is here. And He is certainly able to make us stand.

AMEN