Strong: Courage Over Fear - Part 3

# Hold on To Your Faith

## (Joshua 10:1-14)

Welcome today to all of you, it really is such a privilege to be able to share the Word of God with you week after week, because I know that when you come to church, you are coming to be built up and encouraged. You are coming because you’re expecting that God is going to speak to you. And so, my prayer is that he’s going to move the heavens and the earth to do those things that he’s prepared for you before the beginning of time. And so, I really do consider it a great honor to be able to share with you this word of encouragement from the Lord today.

As I was thinking about what I wanted to share with you this week, you know, something that would encourage you to be strong and courageous. Not just to keep walking, to keep marching ahead, but something bigger and better, something greater than all that. And so, as I was reading the book of Joshua, I read this text that I want to share with you today, but I found myself wondering, pondering how I was going to get from there to here?

I can’t tell you how many times on a Thursday afternoon I’ve been surrounded by pages of notes and yet still uncertain about how to get from there to here on Sunday morning. I wonder if any of you can relate? You know, maybe for you, it’s Wednesday morning and you’ve got a big decision to make. Maybe for you, it’s about your family or your children. Maybe for you it’s a financial decision, it’s the end of the month and you’ve been praying about it, but you’re still uncertain how to get from there to here?

Well, I wanted to share with you one of the greatest miracles in the Bible from Joshua chapter 10 and I found myself wondering how I was going to get from there to here. You see, I wanted to challenge you to hold onto your faith and to begin to pray like Joshua prayed in our text because God wants to encourage you. He wants you to know that he can do more than you ask or imagine anywhere you desperately need him to do something, but you’ve got to hold onto your faith, because he responds the faith.

In our message series, the Israelites, the children of God, have finally made it, they’re in the promised land. God brought them out from there, so that he might bring them here, that’s what Moses told them as they were about to go in, he said this in Deuteronomy chapter 4, he said God loved your forefathers and…

*“brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you, and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance as it is today” (Deuteronomy 4:37-38).*

He said, “God brought you out from there, so that he might bring you in here.” I love that, because God’s purpose is always to bring you out of something because he wants to bring you into something else, something so much better.

The New Testament says that,

*“He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).*

And yet, unlike most of us, God always finishes what he starts. That’s why he’s called: *“The author and finisher of our faith…” (Heb. 12:2, NKJV).*

And so, God brought them out of Egypt, he brought this new generation into Canaan, into the promised land, just like he’s bringing you and I into new things. And certainly, we’ve all had new experiences in 2020 and yet God is bringing each of one us further in our walk with him, and deeper in our relationship with him.

Even though you may be struggling with the restrictions, the financial, emotional, and relational challenges on the journey, the Bible tells us,

*“The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; your mercy, O Lord, endures forever…” (Psalms 138:8, NKJV).*

And so, he will bring it to completion, he will finish the work, he will bring us all the way in, he will perfect that which concerns you and me.

And so, God brought the Israelites out from there, to bring them into here, into the promised land, but the promised land was also a problem land. In other words, it’s not a problem free land, because once they get in, there are enemies, there are territories to conquer, and even though they get to shout and see the walls of Jericho fall down, they’ve also got to get their swords out, they’ve got to march and fight some battles. So, it’s the promised land, but it’s not without problems, and they’re going to have to rely upon God’s power and God’s strength to take possession of all that he has for them.

Now, last week, in Joshua chapter 6, we saw the Israelites miraculous victory over that great high walled stronghold known as Jericho. And yet how many of you know that it is usually right after a victory that Satan begins to attack? And so, no sooner did Israel plunder Jericho then did Satan begin his subtle attacks and they were defeated by Ai. Once they prayed and sought the Lord, they discovered the sin of Achan which had caused their defeat, and after purifying themselves, they defeated Ai. But then almost immediately, Joshua was deceived and rushed into making a peace treaty with the Gibeonites without seeking the counsel of God. And so, it’s one thing after another, they’re in the promised land, but it’s really a problem land.

Joshua led the people 30 miles north to Shechem, which lies in the valley between two mountains and they paused there to worship the Lord. They interrupted military activities to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice fellowship offerings to the Lord. They took a timeout to review and reaffirm their covenant relationship with God…

*“As Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded them…” (Joshua 8:31).*

And so, it was a great worship service, but while they were worshiping God, the kings of Canaan were strategizing on how to destroy them. And as soon as church was over, the Israelites were faced with yet another battle in chapter 10. Verse one says that,

*“Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai and totally destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and that the people of Gibeon had made a treaty of peace with Israel and were living near them” (Joshua 10:1).*

*“He and his people were very much alarmed at this, because Gibeon was an important city, like one of the royal cities; it was larger than Ai, and all its men were good fighters” (Joshua 10:2).*

*“So Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem appealed to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish and Debir king of Eglon. "Come up and help me attack Gibeon," he said, "because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites” (Joshua 10:3-4).*

And so, Joshua and the Israelites have conquered three cities, they’re worshiping God, they’re feeling invincible, when verse five says,

*“Then the five kings of the Amorites — the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon — joined forces. They moved up with all their troops and took up positions against Gibeon and attacked it” (Joshua 10:5).*

Now, the Gibeonites panicked not knowing what to do, and so they sent word to Joshua in verse six,

*“Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us! Help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us” (Joshua 10:6).*

Now, what I find interesting about this is that when the men of Gibeon recognized that they were headed for destruction, they call upon Joshua who is an Old Testament type and form of the name Jesus. And so, they have a pretty good strategy, don’t they? Since they’ve come into covenant with Joshua, they cry out for him to deliver them, they cast their anxieties on him, and they put their trust in him to save them. It’s a great strategy and verse seven says,

*“Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men” (Joshua 10:7).*

Now, Joshua on the other hand, had got himself into trouble, he’d made a mistake because he’d made an alliance with some people that he should have destroyed. And so, now he finds himself needing God to get him out of a situation that he never should have got himself into.

Some of you, can relate to Joshua if you have ever gotten yourself into a situation that you needed God to get you out of. And God is able to turn our mistakes into a miracle, because we have a promise from Jesus our Joshua in Matthew chapter 28,

*“Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).*

And so, you can trust in his promise that he will never leave you and he will never forsake you.

Both Joshua and the Gibeonites found themselves in a challenging situation, but God was up to something and I love God strategy. Instead of having Joshua conquer each one of these five cities one by one, he accelerates the advancement of the Israelites by having them fight all five battles at one time on one day.

Watch what happens next, the Lord said to Joshua in verse eight,

*“Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you" (Joshua 10:8).*

I’m so grateful that I serve a God who delivered Joshua from a battle that he shouldn’t have even been fighting, because so many times I don’t get it right either. You know, it would be nice if we always did things God’s way the first time around, but it usually doesn’t work that way.

And so, God stepped in and said, “I have given them into your hand.” Just like he said, “I have delivered Jericho into your hands” last week. And only God could say that because it’s his prerogative, it’s called omniscience, it’s his sovereignty and providence hand-in-hand. And so, before the battle even begins, its done, as the psalmist said,

*“Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God… a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by or like a watch in the night” (Psalm 90:2,4).*

And so, before the battle begins, God looks and it’s over, it’s past tense, and that’s why prophecy comes naturally to him. That’s why he can give such detail in advance, because to him it’s as good as done, he says, “I have given them into your hand.”

*“After an all-night march from Gigal,” verse nine says, “Joshua took them by surprise. The Lord threw them into confusion before Israel, who defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah” (Joshua 10:9-10).*

Now, Joshua may have taken them by surprise, the Israelites may have been engaged in the battle, but it was the Lord who secured the victory. It was the Lord who threw them into confusion, it was the Lord who defeated them, and by implication it was the Lord who pursued them along the road, and it was the Lord who cut them down.

I just love it when God fights, because he fights so much better than we do. There are times when I want to give it right back, it’s in my nature, but it’s so much more rewarding to pull back and let God fight our battles. You know, if the enemy attacks you, you can defend yourself, but it will wear you out. Or you can let the Lord defend you and it’s a lot more fun, because he so much more creative than we are. In fact, look at what happened in verse 11, the Bible says,

*“As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky, and more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites” (Joshua 10:11).*

This is just so amazing, there’s no natural explanation for this, there’s really no way to look at it other than it’s a miracle. The source is from God, the object is selective, and the sum total is miraculous. The Israelites are fighting and yet God took out more of the enemy than they did, he scored more points than they did and without accidentally taking any of them out. Don’t you just love that? Our God can do more in a moment than you or I can do in a lifetime of trying to do it our own way.

Now, before I read this next verse, I want to prepare you, because I want you to really engage your spirit in what I’m about to share. In other words, you’re going to have to get your mind and your heart set on a target, some objective or goal that God is calling you to pray for, to believe for, but that seems impossible for you right now. Because I don’t believe that Jesus saved us just to get by, too many of us have settled into comfortable complacency, we’ve been holding onto low expectations, we’ve been playing it safe, instead of believing God for the impossible. But I’ve been praying that God would use this message to be a catalyst to believe him for the impossible in your life.

This next verse really summarizes the kind of faith filled prayers that God wants you and me to experience in our lives. It’s the way I want to live my life and the kind of life I want to know firsthand. And here it is in verse 12,

*“On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon” (Joshua 10:12).*

Here’s what I have come to understand about faith, you don’t have to know how it’s going to work out, you certainly don’t rely on your feelings, but you have got to hold onto your faith. And so, I want to encourage you to start praying “sun stand still” prayers, knowing that you don’t have to understand in order to pray, because Joshua didn’t even get the prayer right. It wasn’t a very long prayer, just 13 words, but he prayed that the sun would stand still, even though it the earth that revolves around the sun. But God responded to the faith of Joshua, because this is the kind of prayer that he loves. In verse 13, the Bible tells us,

*“So, the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel” (Joshua 10:13-14).*

I believe that the same God who made the sun stand still for Joshua, the same God who raised his only Son from the dead, wants to reveal himself to anyone today who will call on his name and believe him to do the impossible. You see, not only did that happen then, but miracles still happen today, wherever a believer is bold enough to say,

“God, I’m holding onto my faith, believing that you are fighting for me and believing you for miracles through my life.”

I wonder today, what is that impossible prayer that you need to pray, that impossible thing that God wants to do through your life, and I’m wondering if you will be bold enough to pray for it?

You know, we can’t abuse this, because God is not some giant Santa in the sky, but the Bible tells us in first John chapter 5,

*“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15).*

And so, it’s not like we are little gods running around telling the sun and moon what to do, but I want to encourage you not to quit, to hold onto your faith and just believe. And my prayer is that the Word of God is going to stir up your hope, building up your faith, because there was a time when you believed God was able to do things like this. There was a time when you were going to do great things for God, you were going to make a difference in the world, but now you have settled into survival mode, the sun is going down, and the opportunities are getting away.

I want to challenge you to hold onto your faith and believe. Hold onto your faith like Moses, because Moses could have quit, he could’ve given up. I mean, he saw nine plagues unleashed on Egypt, he had nine reasons to stop believing, because the Pharaoh refused to let the people go. But Moses held onto his faith, remembering the promise that he would lead his people out of that land of slavery into a land flowing with milk and honey.

I want to encourage you to hold onto your faith like Joshua who marched around Jericho four times, five times, six times and still nothing. You’ve got one more lap to go, the battle was still raging, the sun was going down, and the Joshua could’ve quit. He could’ve given up because it was too late, but at the last minute, he held onto his faith and he prays 13 words that stopped the calendar for just over 23 hours. God did the very thing that Joshua had the courage to ask him to do.

In the same way, the Bible says that on the day that Jesus died, when he was hanging on the cross, being murdered by the very people that he came to save, as they whipped his back to shreds and beat him beyond recognition, he said,

*“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).*

And then, the sky grew dark as he breathed his last breath and cried out,

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).*

And the God of the universe intervened, stepping through time and space, making salvation possible to everyone who would believe on his name.

On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead, he walked out of the grave and proved once and for all that anything’s possible and it doesn’t matter how dead your situation seems to be. You see, that’s the kind of God we serve, he’s a God who will hang on a cross and talk about resurrection so that he can prove himself faithful in your life. And if you’ve been saved by the grace of God and you have received the forgiveness of your sins you are a living example that God can do anything and you have seen the sun standstill.

Some of you are right here, this is so relevant, and God is speaking to you about something that you need, something that you thought was impossible, something you didn’t have the courage to pray for. But this is mission impossible, it’s the ninth hour, and you don’t want to minimize what the presence of our God will accomplish when you hold onto your faith and ask him for the impossible.

Let’s pray together.

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