Strong - Part 4

# Just as Strong Today

## (Joshua 14:1-13).

Welcome, I’m so glad you’re here today, because we’re wrapping up our series “Strong” and the Lord has given me something to share with you that I believe will be such an encouragement to you. And so, if you’re here or maybe you’re watching online, I’ve prayed that whoever needs to hear this message would do whatever it takes to get this word this morning. And so, this is your message because the Lord has seen what you’re wrestling with and he wants to empower you to persevere, to rise up, and to overcome; he wants to give you a different perspective.

Now, last week, we saw a prayer of Joshua that was intimidating, it seemed like a long shot, an impossibility, but we saw that it was just the right kind of prayer for our God. Joshua prayed that the sun would stand still, giving God the opportunity to display his glory so that the world would know that he is fighting our battles for us. And so, even now scientists are still trying to figure out what happened to those twenty-three and a-half hours on our calendar so many centuries ago.

You see, it was on that day so long ago that God responded to Joshua’s faith, demonstrating that he’s able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us (Ephesians 3:20). And I wish I could tell you that its always going to be that easy. You know, just believe God for whatever and it’s as good as done; but it doesn’t always work that way. In fact, sometimes you may ask God to make the sun stand still, and you’re encouraging yourself in the Lord, your faith is increasing, and you’re believing that your miracle is coming, but the sky keeps getting darker and that relationship keeps getting colder. You were believing in a promise, you asked, and you believed he could do it; but as soon you got your hopes up, something brought them crashing down.

I feel like there are some of you listening today and that’s where you are in your personal life. You’re reading your Bible and praying, faith is rising up inside of you, God is giving you hope that it’s possible, because Jesus said,

*“Everything is possible for him who believes” (Mark 9:23).*

And so, you’re believing God for something in faith, but actually everything has gotten worse, and so now you’re beginning to wish that you never got your hopes up.

But God keeps saying that it’s possible, that you can be free, and if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed, and so you believe your breakthrough is coming, that you’re gonna make a difference. And yet all the while you’ve got this other voice in the back of your mind telling you, “You’ve tried this before, why even bother? What makes you think it’s going to be different this time?” And maybe it’s been years that you’ve been trying to get your life together, praying to be free from that addiction, asking God to resurrect your marriage, and yet now you’re beginning to wonder why even bother asking? You know, why should I even bother trusting God, praying and believing for that miracle?

But isn’t that the question that has challenged humanity since the creation of the world? You know, why bother praying, why bother serving, why bother tithing? Certainly, that was behind the conflict of Cain and Abel; that was the question posed to Noah by his neighbors; and it had to have scrolled through Abram’s mind when God said,

*“Go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation” (Genesis 12:1-2).*

Because when God called Abram, he wasn’t the father of anything, he wasn’t anyone’s father. In fact, when God called him to go, he was too old to have kids, his wife was too old to have kids, and her womb was barren. Sarai had never born a child and yet God promised to create a great nation out of their impossible situation.

This is the same kind of situation that Moses found himself in when God called him at the burning bush; and it’s really about perspective, because God can speak something over your life, and you can look at it forwards, backwards and upside down and still not see it. And so, today we need to understand this, because this is important, and our perception or ability to see what God has spoken over us literally determines where we end up in our lives.

And I mentioned Moses because he’s a perfect example. If this weren’t true, he wouldn’t have died in the wilderness. You see, Moses regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt and the Bible says,

*“By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27).*

Moses saw God, but he didn’t see himself as God saw him, and so he didn’t receive what had been promised. That’s what the author of Hebrews asks,

*“Who was it who rebelled against God even though they heard his voice? Wasn't it the people Moses led out of Egypt? … And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they would never enter his rest? … So, we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest” (Hebrews 3:16-19, NLT).*

In the same way, God can call us, he can give us a promise, even empowering us, but we can still fall short of the promise because we don’t believe how God sees us; because we don’t believe what he has spoken over us. And so, our perception of God’s view of us makes all the difference in the world.

That’s why we need to know our Bibles, we need to know that he made us from “the dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7). We need to know what he said about us, that he took something dirty, something as limited as we are, and yet the Bible says,

*“He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature…” (2 Peter 1:4).*

And so, God created us in his likeness and in his image so that we may participate in the divine nature and reflect the glory of God in us. And yet, this is something that many of us spend our whole lives trying to figure out. In fact, this is what the nation of Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness trying to figure out. Who am I and what am I called to do?

As the nation of Israel came to the threshold of the Promised Land, God called Joshua and spoke promise and purpose over him, he said,

*“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. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them” (Joshua 1:5-6).*

God spoke promise and purpose over Joshua, two things that each of us need to know and believe to find meaning in life.

And so, as we come to Joshua chapter 14, it’s not just the nation of Israel taking possession of the land, but they’re walking in their purpose, they’re walking in their identity. The children of Israel are finally coming into their national identity, their walking in the promise given to Abraham, and yet it’s hard to see. It’s hard to see, because they started from something so small and they’ve been through so much.

In verse one, Joshua and the priest are casting lots, and the Bible says,

*“These are the areas the Israelites received as an inheritance in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel allotted to them. Their inheritances were assigned by lot to the nine-and-a-half tribes, as the Lord had commanded through Moses” (Joshua 14:1-2).*

And so, the Israelites were dividing the land, the nation of Israel is dividing; nine and a half tribes are getting a portion of land on this side, because the other two and a half tribes wanted their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. And so, now they’re casting lots, they’re shaking it and tossing it out; however, it fell determined which tribe gets this and which tribe gets that. But suddenly, Caleb pushes through the crowd and says, “Just hold on a minute Joshua. You’re not going to determine where I live by rolling the dice because I’ve got a promise.”

In verse six he said, “(Joshua), you know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, but my brothers who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt with fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly” (Joshua 14:6-9).

And so, Moses made a promise and Caleb was holding onto that promise even though Moses was unable to hold onto his promise.

You see, Moses was supposed to lead the people into the promised land, but he was unable to do it because he didn’t see himself as God saw him. And so, it was his perception, not just of his national identity, but of his personal identity as partaking of the divine nature. It was the understanding of that reality, that they had been created in the image and likeness of God with promise and purpose that separated Moses and Caleb at the Jordan River.

As a matter of fact, that is the same thing that separated Moses from Abraham. Now, admittedly Abraham had his own challenges that he struggled with, he had a hard time working it out; but God brought him out of his limited perspective and gave him an eternal perspective. God called him out of his tent in Genesis chapter 15 and said,

*“Look up at the heavens and count the stars — if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be” (Genesis 15:5).*

In other words, just as the stars are uncountable, so shall your offspring be. And God gave Abraham an image in his mind, and this is so powerful because there is a way that God sees you that no one else knows but you. Abraham saw it and got it, but Moses didn’t. Caleb saw it and understood, but millions of others didn’t. And honestly, I think it really depends on what you’re looking at or what you’re focused on.

Most of you have probably looked into those mirrors that are distorted, you know the ones that make you look shorter than you really are, taller than you really are, wider than you really are, or narrower than you really are. And I wonder, how many of you have ever had people around you that made you feel a certain way about yourself?

Maybe you’re like me and when you look in the mirror you see more and more gray hair and it makes me feel a certain way about myself. It makes me feel like these six kids have taken their toll on me, it makes me feel like I’m getting old, but you know what I realized, sometimes you’ll see a distorted image of yourself. Instead of seeing the eternal, you may start matching your life with what you see in your mind, instead of reflecting the image of God within you.

You see, the Bible says, “(Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15). And that’s the image that we want to reflect. And yet, we often find ourselves surrounded by skeptical people who are holding up a distorted mirror making you feel smaller than you really are, weaker than you really are, because you’re not looking at the right image. But when you keep your eyes on Jesus and you keep looking up like Abraham, you keep counting the stars, you keep hoping, and you keep trying, because you know that God is not done yet. You know that, “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” and he knows the end of your story (Philippians 1:6).

And so, Moses had made a promise and Caleb was holding onto that promise. He pulls Joshua to the side and they take a walk down memory lane. He reminds him of when the Lord told Moses to send some men to explore the land, and Moses had chosen them along with ten other men, telling them…

*“See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees on it or not… (Numbers 13:18-20)?*

And the Bible tells us that those twelve spies went in, they had the faith to go in, the strength to go in, but the majority saw themselves as being too small because they had fixed their attention on the wrong things. Ten of them fixed their attention on the challenge, instead of what God had said, and so when they came back, ten of those twelve spies said,

*“We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored” (Numbers 13:31-32).*

They said, “They’re too big, we can’t go in,” and they stole a promise from millions of people who had a promise from God. They gave a bad report and the Israelites were afraid and stayed outside of Canaan, outside of the promised land, and that’s why it’s so important who you hang around with, what you look at, and who you listen to.

So, the men come back from searching out the land, and they’re giving a report. They say,

*“We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit” (Numbers 13:27).*

And the Bible says, they brought back this cluster of grapes so big that they had to carry it on a pole, but they stopped looking at the grapes, they stopped looking at what God had promised them, and they started talking about giants. In verse 33 they said,

*“We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” (Numbers 13:33).*

In other words, according to our own evaluation, according to our own limited perspective, we seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes. And so, their evaluation of the enemy was not based on how big their God was, but how big the enemy was, and their flawed perception determined their reality.

Ten of those spies were walking by sight and not by faith, and so even though God had promised them the victory, they said we can’t go in because of the size of the giants. And their perspective was way off, because if the giants were that big, just imagine how much greater God is. If what is coming against you is that big and the Bible says that,

*“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4, NKJV).*

Then the size of your giant, your difficulty, your problem, and your impossibility is simply the proof of the size of your God.

I love what Caleb says, he’s like, who cares what the Nephilim think we look like.

*“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us” (Romans 8:31)?*

And so, he silenced the people in verse 30 and said,

*“We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it” (Numbers 13:30).*

And so, Caleb refused to let unbelievers who were struggling with their own sense of identity determine his. He believed what God had promised, he saw things in a different way, and I love that about Caleb.

You see, there are only two things that the wilderness can do to you, it can kill you or it can make you stronger. And so, look at what Caleb said to Joshua in chapter 14, verse 10,

*“Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then” (Joshua 14:10-11).*

In other words, everything he went through over the last 45 years only convinced him even more that if God promised it to him back then, and he made it through the wilderness, that he was going to hold onto that promise. And so, he said, I’m just as strong today,

*“Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said” (Joshua 14:12).*

Caleb recognized that without a battle there couldn’t be a victory, but many of us have failed to recognize what God is doing through the process and so we settle for something that is so much less than what was promised.

I wonder how many of you have gone to the mirror and God is trying to get you to see yourself as he sees you. Some of you have been looking at the wrong things, listening to the wrong voices, and the image you see is distorted because what you see is a grasshopper when you’re really a giant. Today, God is encouraging you to hold onto the promise, because you’re just as strong today, the one who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

And so, you’ve got to hold onto the promise, and in verse 13, the Bible says,

*“Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance” (Joshua 14:13).*

You see, Caleb wouldn’t settle for anything less than the promise and he was blessed. He remembered the promise that he would live in a high place; and Joshua blessed him and gave him Hebron, a place 3000 feet above sea level. You see, Joshua had a different perspective and he wasn’t just settling for his lot in life, he was willing to face a challenge, he was willing to fight for the high ground, because he was holding onto a promise.

He was going for something greater, something more powerful, and so he was looking for an opportunity to prove God faithful again. He said, I’m just as strong today, I want to live on the high ground, and I survived 45 years in the wilderness to receive my promise. I’m not ashamed of what I went through, because it only proves the faithfulness of my God.

I wonder if there are some of you today who need to visualize it, you’ve got something in your mind but you got to get it under your feet. You’ve got to recognize that you’ve been set free even when you don’t feel free and you’ve got to know that you have a higher purpose because there is a greater name. And so, I want to encourage you, whatever you’ve been clinging to, be strong and courageous, let go of the way that you see yourself, let go of your own plans, your own dreams, and hang on to the everlasting goodness and the grace of our God.

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