



Sermon Series: Risk-Takers: The Adventure of Walking by Faith

To be used with Session Two: Joshua: A Faith Rooted in God's Word

Sermon Title Possibilities: Order My Steps in Your Word

Scripture: Joshua 1:1-9,16-18

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the Bible study “Joshua: A Faith Rooted in God’s Word,” this sermon emphasizes that faith is grounded in obedience to God’s Word. God declared in Deuteronomy 13:4, “It is the Lord your God you must follow, and Him you must revere. Keep His commands and obey Him; serve Him and hold fast to Him.” Obedience to God’s Word is a demonstration of not only our love for God (Jn. 14:15), but of our faith in God. James says, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works...for just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:18-26).

Introduction: When we see lightning flash, we expect to hear thunder follow. If there were no lightning, there would be no thunder because one causes the other. It’s like that with faith and obedience. Just as thunder always follows lightning, obedience always follows true faith. When king Saul thought he could bring offerings in lieu of obedience to God, so he could keep the “blessings,” from the spoils of war, the prophet Samuel responded, “Does the Lord take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22). We can’t bribe God to accept our disobedience. We can’t pay him off so that we don’t have to pay attention. Instead of trying to bribe God to keep “blessings,” it’s obedience that brings blessings. Psalm 1:1-3 declares:

*¹Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
²But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
³He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,*

*Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.*

The person who's blessed is the one who walks in the ways of the Lord (Psalm 128:1).

1. Joshua 1:1-5. Encouraged by God's Word.

The opening chapter of Joshua signals a new era in the life of the nation of Israel. Seneca, the stoic philosopher of ancient Rome has been credited with the quote "every new beginning comes from the other beginning's end," which means that the conclusion of a matter is also the opportunity for a fresh start. The close of one chapter is the opening of a new chapter. But to begin this new chapter, especially considering the leader that Joshua was succeeding. "No prophet has arisen again in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unparalleled..." (Deut. 34:10-11), Joshua needed an encouraging word from the Lord. God promised to be with Joshua in the same way He had been with Moses. It reminds us that God doesn't play "favorites" (Acts 10:34). We don't need to cower in someone else's shadow, try to walk in someone else's footsteps, or live up to someone else's success. We need not have "comparisonitis." The same God, who was with them, is with us. The same God who worked through them to accomplish His purposes, is the same God who's working through us!

God's words to Joshua were in the form of a military command, which signaled that Joshua would need to march, and Joshua would need to fight, but the battle was the Lord's. There are times we may need to march against the overwhelming and fight against the insurmountable, but the battle is not yours, it's the Lord's.

2. Joshua 1:6-9. Ruminant on God's Word.

A ruminant is a mammal, like a cow, sheep, or goat. Most ruminants have four chambered stomachs. Ruminants are unable to digest the plant material they eat directly. Therefore, the ingested plant material is stored in the first chamber of the stomach, softened and regurgitated back into the mouth with what is then called "cud," hence the phrase "chew the cud," which means to "pour over, meditate, ponder." This "chewing the cud" continues until the plant material is processed through all four chambers.

God said, "this book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate [ruminate] on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it" (v. 8). We should chew on the word, digest it, let it ruminate in our spirits, bring it back up, "chew the cud," until we fully understand it. But since this is to be done "day and night," it is a lifetime process. We are to live by the word, since we are to "carefully observe everything written in it." The Bible says, "man does not live by bread alone, but from every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Deut. 8:3). Meditating on the word is where we find our strength and courage. Obedience to word is how we prosper

and succeed. “Commit your works to the Lord [submit and trust them to Him], and your plans will succeed [if you respond to His will and guidance]” (Prov. 16:3 AMP).

3. **Joshua 1:16-18. Obedience to God’s Word.**

Three times the word “obey” is used in these selected verses. The word “obey” means “to hear and heed; to listen and do.” The leaders obeyed Joshua just like they obeyed Moses. They not only respected Joshua as the new leader that God had chosen, and Moses laid hands on; but they also recognized that the Lord was with Joshua the same way He was with Moses. They obeyed Joshua’s commands because they recognized them as God’s commands. The reason they recognized them as God’s commands is because they had heard these words before. In other words, because they knew the word, they also knew that Joshua was obeying God’s word and instructing them according to God’s word.

While we should respect the leaders that God has place over us, we are not to follow them uninformed. Acts 17 informs us that the people of Berea were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, since they received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true (v.11). Consequently, they believed. While they respected Paul enough to listen to him, they came to believe Paul and follow Jesus because based on the word, they knew what Paul was saying was the truth. We should respect, listen to, and support our leaders, but ultimately our obedience is based on God’s word. Paul himself said, “Follow my example as I follow Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1 – NIV).

Conclusion:

Psalms 119:105 states, “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.” Joe Stowell gives an illustration that following God is like driving a car at night. He doesn’t show us where He’s taking us. He just asks us to trust Him to get us there. Our headlights illuminate about 160 feet ahead of us, they don’t shine all the way to our destination. But that doesn’t stop us from moving forward. While we don’t know all that is ahead, we trust our headlights to give us enough light to keep moving forward. God’s word is like headlights in the dark. He knows the entirety of the plans He has for us (Jer. 29:11). However, His word to us is “every place where the sole of your foot treads,” will lead to what I’ve promised you (Joshua 1:3). In dark times, you have to trust that God will never leave you, nor forsake you and believe His word will be a lamp for your feet and a light for your path that will get you safely to what He’s promised you.

Author Bio

Dr. Jerome F. Coleman is the lead pastor at the First Baptist Church of Crestmont, Willow Grove, PA., and current Vice-President of the National African American Fellowship (NAAF). He has an earned doctorate in Pastoral Leadership from Carolina University. He is also the grateful husband of Kimberly to whom he has been married 28 years.