

Joshua

by T. Austin-Sparks

Joshua's leadership is a model of spiritual leadership, demonstrating the importance of courage, faithfulness, and the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in pursuing the fullness of Christ.

Scripture: Joshua 1:6

Topics: "Courage in Faith", "Leadership"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the leadership of Joshua as a vital link between the salvation from Egypt and the promise of the Promised Land, paralleling Joshua's role with that of Jesus. He highlights that Joshua's leadership embodies the fullness of Christ and the necessity of spiritual courage in the face of opposition and compromise. Joshua's unwavering commitment to God's purpose and his secret history with God are essential traits of effective leadership. The sermon underscores that true leadership requires reliability, a soldier's spirit, and an acceptance of the Holy Spirit's sovereignty. Ultimately, Joshua's courage is presented as a model for believers to follow in their spiritual battles.

Transcript

In our quest for instruction in leadership which the Scriptures contain, there is a wealth of teaching given in our second great Old Testament instance, namely Joshua.

Oshea -- Joshua -- Jehoshua -- Jesus means "The Lord -- the Saviour".

Joshua, like the One whom he typifies, is the link joining the great salvation from with the great salvation unto. Moses, in the main, had to do with the salvation from. Joshua entered into that, shared it, and then took it to the great unto of its purpose.

The unto broke down in the case of Moses, although he laid its foundation. It broke down with the first generation who came out. They failed to go through. The New Testament repeatedly refers to this failure in the most solemn warnings to Christians of this dispensation. In so doing it reflects the very great importance of the leadership-work of Joshua, and thereby lifts Joshua and his special aspect of leadership on to very high and vital ground. Nothing less than the whole import of salvation, and therefore ninety percent of the New Testament is represented by the leadership of Joshua. True, in his own case, it failed in full realization and Joshua did not lead them into the "rest" (Heb. 4:8). But he did, in eternal principles, lead to the One who has made his work complete, even Jesus.

In order, therefore, to understand the true meaning and value of Joshua's vocation we have to begin from the full issue and then work over the particular steps to see the fundamentals of that vocation.

There is no doubt that Joshua was the Old Testament counterpart of Paul, each in his different and respective sphere. The one, the earthly, temporal and limited; the other in the heavenly, spiritual and universal.

In both cases the dominating issue was

The fulness of Christ

as being God's supreme and all-inclusive purpose. This was -- and is -- the object of the salvation "out from". Failing this salvation has lost its most essential meaning and object. Failing this we inherit all the reproaches resultant from the tragedy of Kadesh-barnea. Failing this we are in the first letter to the Corinthians where -- with this very example presented -- a life-work can go up in smoke in "the day", and we be saved "yet only as by fire". Failing this the most grievous things in the New Testament (see the Letter to the Hebrews chapters 6 and 10, etc.) will apply to us. From both the Old Testament history and the New Testament admonitions it is evident that it is possible to be saved in an elementary sense but lose the "inheritance" and it is the inheritance which justifies all.

Thus Joshua represents the leadership which, energized by the Holy Spirit, has in view that fulness into which Christ has entered and which He is and has for His people. Nothing less or other than that.

This is a tremendous thing and it constitutes a very great vocation. It gives leadership its highest and fullest meaning. If it should be argued to the contrary on the ground that Joshua is hardly mentioned in the New Testament and his name is not listed with the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, the fact is that, rather than that weakening the contention, it only strengthens it, and that overwhelmingly. The Joshua of the Old Testament is swallowed up in his transcendentally great Namesake of the New -- Jesus. Further, Joshua was absolutely overshadowed and mastered by "the captain of the host of the Lord", and thus the Holy Spirit eclipses the human vessel.

What Joshua really represents then is Christ under the anointing Spirit committed to the full purpose of God -- the heavenly inheritance, God's fulness in His Son.

Who will say that to have even a small place in this work is not pre-eminently important? Here then leadership takes on its superlative meaning.

Having pointed this out in so few words, we are able to go right back and trace the steps in Joshua's life and schooling, the features and factors which led to his high vocation and which are basic to such leadership. Let it be understood that for many years Joshua himself was in the school of leadership. He was being tested, proved, drawn out to be approved. This aspect of his history was in the wilderness, and forty being the number of probation, Joshua's leadership had its difficult and testing probation. No one leaps suddenly into this vocation. A great deal of history lies behind this ministry.

It will surprise no one that, with such a purpose in view, leadership is fundamentally linked with warfare.

Joshua -- the man of war

We first meet Joshua in connection with the withstanding of God's people by Amalek (Ex. 17). So early in the people's history, as they start with freshness toward the ultimate goal, evil forces arise to bar the way. Amalek took the initiative -- "then fought Amalek". We need not embark upon all the details such as what Amalek typifies in spiritual conflict. The opposing forces take various forms, choosing their own significant ground and time. For our purpose the fact of opposition is the occasion for bringing to light what was there, but hidden, as God's answer.

It is in a time of conflict, when the enemy takes the initiative that there is revealed what fighting spirit there is hidden amongst the Lord's people. Joshua was the embodiment of this spirit. He knew that this move of the enemy signified a disputing of the inheritance. It was not just an incidental and unrelated thing. Defeat here had a long-range connection. Everything was involved. There would be many battles ahead and the approach of the full end would be marked by an intensification of conflict from which there would be very brief, if any, respite, but this very early assault involved the whole.

It would be a great thing if the Lord's people saw everything in the light of the full end and weighed what seems but incidental against the whole involvement of a defeat at any given point. How much hangs upon this spirit of leadership coming to light at a critical moment! Leadership, in Joshua's case, was hidden, so far as the record shows until the hour of real need. Then it is found to have been there but latent. But there is little doubt that Joshua had

A secret history with God

So we come to a vital factor in leadership. It is a secret history with God which is motivated by a deep and intense jealousy for God's full thought. Later it came out in the revealing occasion when he and Caleb stood alone against all Israel.

The second occasion on which we meet Joshua is equally revealing as to his spirit. It is when Moses was in the mount with God. The forty days had proved too much for the patience of this vacillating and self-willed people. They broke loose and Aaron's part in it was deeply discreditable. (The story is in Exodus 32.)

As Moses descended the mount, picking up Joshua on the way down, they heard the noise in the camp. It must have been loud and confused; indeed, very wild. Consistent with his very spirit, Joshua interpreted it as "the noise of battle". The war-horse thought he scented conflict. He was right, although the battle element was deeper than the appearance. They were making merry, but their very merriment was a battle against God.

Jealousy for God's honour will sense and see the really inimical and hostile elements in things like this. Anything that threatens to take the Lord's unique and utter place will make one like Joshua instinctively scent battle and rise to it in spirit. Joshua represents utterness for God and of God and this always means battle. If the whole purpose of God concerning His Son and His church really captures the spirit, compromise is intolerable and unthinkable. In this, Joshua does foreshadow his great New Testament counterpart Paul, and they very definitely meet in the latter's Letter to the Galatians.

The spirit of battle which characterized Joshua on the way down the mountain found its very definite materializing in the immediate act of Moses. His challenge of: "Who is on the Lord's side" found Joshua a wholly committed man. The test was a very grim and exacting one, but it is evident that he was wholly one with "the sons of Levi" in their uncompromising course.

The tent was pitched outside the camp and to it Moses, Joshua, with the sons of Levi resorted at the call of Moses. This brings us to the next significant mention of Joshua: "...Joshua... departed not out of the tent". Joshua had chosen the place of complete separation and difference at great cost, and there he stayed.

The Letter to the Hebrews takes this incident up and applies it, on the one side to the compromising Judaisers, which it calls "the camp"; and on the other side to the non-compromising, committed devotees to Jesus Christ. It says that to the latter "outside the camp" is the place of "bearing his reproach".

Here, then, we have come to two more factors in true spiritual leadership. One is that the true leader is one who will never, however much it costs, be drawn into compromise. A leader must never be weak. He must never allow policy to override principle. He must never allow popular opinion to weaken his committedness. He must never allow sentiment to dilute his strength. He must never let sociability make him sacrifice supreme interests and spiritual or moral integrity under the cover and pretext of a false usage of Paul's words about becoming "all things to all men". "Hebrews" says that "outside the camp" where Joshua elected to be is the unpopular place, and it is always very testing to be unpopular. But leadership often demands this price.

The other thing which arises at this point in the case of Joshua is reliability. Moses -- not in compromise -- returned to the camp. Joshua abode in the tent. This is stated in the narrative evidently with a serious meaning. What the full meaning is may be left for us to consider, but this one thing is clear, you would always know where to find Joshua. If it were asked, "Where is Joshua?" everybody would have the answer: "O, he is where he always is, in the tent." If Moses needed him he knew where to find him.

Leadership absolutely demands this characteristic of dependableness. What a strength it is to know that a person can be guaranteed to be in a definite spiritual position, right on the spot spiritually; not temperamental, vacillating, variable, or unpredictable. The multitude, especially "the mixed multitude" is like that, not consistently true for two days together. You never know how you are going to find them at any given time. To lead them into anything more of God demands this feature of "abiding". Yes, there may be discouragement, disappointment, provocation, and heartbreak, but true spiritual leadership rests upon an all-or-nothing basis, and deep down there is an abandon to purpose which is stronger than all that is against.

The leader may adjust on points and be open to progressive light, but as to the ultimate divine vision, he will die rather than betray or recant. He is no time-server or opportunist. He cannot be bought off. He is going on or he is going out. He has seen, and he can never unsee. He says, "Here I am, I can do no other. May God help me", or, "this one thing I do."

Such a faithfulness and undeviating committal is something in the very nature of the call and the vocation.

But with all his strength of purpose, Joshua, like his New Testament counterparts, was always in school learning fresh lessons on leadership.

Our next touch with him is very indicative of this. It is in Numbers 11. The Spirit of God is exercising His essential sovereign liberty. Into this sovereign activity certain "laymen" are caught up; that is, men who are not recognized official prophets. They are not in the recognized place for functioning in such a way. Eldad and Medad come under the spontaneous movement of the Spirit and prophesy in the camp. Joshua is alarmed and scandalized. He rushes to Moses in his jealousy for that great man and cries, "My lord

Moses, forbid them". To his amazement and disconcertion, Moses shows no sympathy with his jealousy and conventionality. Rather does Moses rebuke it: "Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets"; "Do not be jealous for me." In other words, "Do not limit the Lord. Do not circumscribe the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit will not be bound by jealous conventionality, nor by human fears as to what He may do next -- "The wind bloweth where it listeth".

The situation is quite clear. Peter had to learn this lesson, and failure to do so fully only resulted in fettering the church and some of its apostles. The absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit was something which meant an immense amount in the after-life of Joshua and his leadership. If it is true that "the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind", that is only another way of saying that the Holy Spirit will demand the right and liberty to overleap our prejudices, our stringencies of interpretation; indeed, anything and everything that makes Christ smaller than He really is.

The very leadership itself can be jeopardized and falsified if this lesson is not well and truly learned.

But our special point here is not the range of the Spirit's work, for the occasion to which we are referring was amongst the Lord's people. What we are especially pointing to as an essential law of leadership is the absolute sovereign rights and liberty of the Holy Spirit to choose His own ways and means, places and times. The government of the Holy Spirit without deference to anyone or anything other than His own nature and authority has to be recognized, acknowledged and accepted in order to implement the divine purpose. This will arise again when the new generation is with Joshua over the Jordan.

Seeing that there is almost as much again to be said regarding leadership as revealed in Joshua, we had better make a break here and put the remainder into a continuation chapter. But let us sum up the points thus far. Leadership

1. Always has to do with a specific purpose.
2. Demands the soldier-spirit.
3. Will not and must not tolerate compromise.
4. Must be characterized by reliability and faithfulness.
5. Requires an absolute acceptance of the complete sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, and therefore a capacity for learning and making adjustments.

Having summarized the general ground of leadership as represented by Joshua, there remains one specific and inclusive factor which is given peculiar prominence and emphasis at the beginning of the book which bears his name. It is

The vital factor of courage

If the first chapters of that book are the preparation for all that follows, or the foundation thereof, then, quite clearly courage is the dominant characteristic.

Four times in the brief first chapter is this note strongly struck: three times by the Lord, and once by the people. Courage is made a command and a demand. "Be strong and of a good courage" is the divine command and requisite.

We have already shown the great context of this leadership; the context of specific vocation. It was the context of

The complement of redemption

There had been the great "Out". Now there was to be the great "In". There had been the tremendous fact of redemption. Now there was to be the purpose of it.

In a sense, so far it had been the negative, the great "No". Now it was to be the immense positive, the emphatic "Yes". As in electric light or power there has to be the negative and the positive, so these two -- No and Yes, fact and purpose -- complete the cycle.

If the "Out" had made immense demands for courage in the case of Moses, the "In" was going to make equal, if not greater, demands in the case of Joshua.

Every value to be secured and every step of advance toward fulness was going to be fraught with powerful and relentless resistance. The issue was no less than absolute dominion, and for this no quarter could be given by either side.

The salvation of the church from the power of Satan's dominion is a costly and withstood matter. But the collective forces of his kingdom are stirred to any and every kind of resistance when it comes to a growing and additional apprehension of Christ and a larger measure of Himself in possession of His people.

Not only the frontal attack or withstanding but the paralysing insinuating of his own character in the form of covetousness, as at Ai, or the deceptiveness of compromise, as with the Gibeonites, are very effective methods. Let it be clearly recognized that the effect of the second of these, with a very long crippling carry-over, was to take the fight out of the Lord's people. It is a subtly effective manoeuvre of the enemy to make the church accept a compromise without the need for battle.

So there was always the temptation to accept an untimely and too-early settlement and satisfaction. This, in the case of Israel, resulted in the terrible period of the "Judges", the disgrace of the Bible.

Discouragement, impatience, and weariness were ever near to rob of fulness and finality.

All this was in the knowledge of God when He laid such emphasis upon courage at the beginning.

We could say that perhaps the greatest weapon of the foe of spiritual progress and fulness is discouragement, and he well knows the menace to his interests of spiritual courage. We need not stay to do more than remark that spiritual courage is a peculiar kind of courage, and of a higher order than physical or even moral courage. The courage of Jesus when on trial, the courage to be silent, was more powerful than any other kind of courage. The courage of the apostles on and after the day of Pentecost was a victory over their own former cowardice and something that was above the natural. To meet the ultimate spiritual forces of this universe requires more than the best natural courage. The best human courage is no match for the devil and his hosts, with their almost boundless resources of subtlety, malice, guile, cunning, strength and tireless energy. Only, as with Joshua, a knowledge of the "Captain of the hosts of the Lord" as being in charge, though unseen, will nerve the spirit of those in this battle.

That function of spiritual leadership to keep vision ever in view and to inspire to its attainment is in itself a battle with disappointment and despair. The leader has to infect others, like Joshua, through

intermediaries, and be a constant inspiration to those in the battle. When he himself is fighting a fierce battle with heartbreak he has to "anoint his face, and go before the people as at other times" and not bring his own personal suffering upon them so that they are weakened. This is a very real aspect of spiritual courage. The leader has to get his courage at first hand from God, and this means many a secret courageous battle with depression. His temptation is very often and fierce to lower his standard, to lessen his demands, to modify his expectations and to accommodate the situation so that it is not so exacting but easier for everyone.

In a thousand ways and in ever-recurring demands, courage is called for as the only way through.

But even the reminder of this may discourage unless we see the other side. So we have to take account of

The incentives of courage

1) The unchanging purpose of God

It was long long before the time of Joshua that God had made known the intention with which Joshua was now confronted. If God could have been discouraged and made to abandon His purpose, He had had more than enough to bring that about. Right here at the threshold of the land was the cemetery of a generation which had failed Him. But, in that instance alone, if it meant the sacrifice of a whole generation God goes on with another and the link is the courage of Joshua and Caleb. What we have just said has an immense amount of history wrapped up in it. (Our book *God's Reactions to Man's Defections* is an enlargement of this matter.) How often the Lord has had to say regarding His purpose, "I meant it to be with this people in this place, and I made a beginning which was in much life, but I am being limited by them. They want an easier way. I cannot go beyond the measure they give Me, so I must move on and carry it further with others and elsewhere." The book of the Revelation is the summation and the consummation of these divine reactions and it sees victory and realization at last, with every faithful remnant present.

This means that, although at many times and with many means it looks as though God has been defeated and frustrated by the imposed limitations of those concerned, He has never abandoned His purpose but is going on.

Forty years were a seeming vacuum in divine purpose, but a new generation was being prepared, and Joshua's courage was vindicated therein.

This persistent, unchanging and unrelenting purpose of God has to be a great encouragement if once the vision has been caught, although many a set-back has been suffered.

2) The end is already secured

To Joshua, before a blow was struck or a step was taken, the Lord's word was, "I have given". While there were conditions of possession as to Joshua and the people, with God there were no chances or peradventures. The end is with Him because He is the end. The test of courage often comes when fierce and remorseless conflict rages around a situation or in relation to some new "possessing", and it is far from easy to believe that this is something that has been given. Then courage means holding on, and there is nothing more to do.

Somehow, somewhere, sometime, a truly committed people will know that God reserved the purpose unto them and that it was in His hands despite all the appearances to the contrary.

3) The Lord's presence

"As I was... so I will be"; "the Lord thy God is with thee" (Josh. 1:5,9).

Two conditions govern the presence of the Lord.

- a. Being wholly committed to, and fully in line with His purpose.
- b. Being completely under the government of, and faithful to His word (see chap. 1).

Given these two things His presence is assured.

Joshua, because of the greatness of the commission, was given an experience of the Lord's presence in the "Captain of the hosts of the Lord", but henceforth he would not see but, like Moses, have to "endure as seeing Him that is invisible".

"The hosts of the Lord" might mean the church militant, or the battling forces of Israel. But, additionally, it certainly means the unseen hosts at the Lord's command. They were seen by a prophet. They are often referred to in Scripture. Jesus spoke of "twelve legions of angels" which could have come to His rescue on request. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews speaks of them as "ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation".

Perhaps we have greater resources by the presence of the Lord than we have realized or reckoned with.

One last word in connection with Joshua and his aspect of leadership.

This courage is a "foot-by-foot" matter. "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon have I given thee."

It is a "sole-of-your-foot" progress and process, not all at once. Every step has to be consolidated. Every few inches, so to speak, have to be secured by conquest, and there will never be a patch that is not marked by courage.

But all this can be so abstract. What does it really mean in practice? It just means this. There are numerous situations and positions where the enemy has his feet, and which he is holding against Christ. It may be a strained or disrupted relationship between two Christians. It may be something in the personal life, in a home situation, in the local assembly, or any one of a thousand things which just locks up those concerned. That ground has got to be taken from the devil. It may necessitate a confession of wrong, a plea for forgiveness, a letting go to God and man. It may require a going back to where we went wrong and seeing if, in any way, the damage can be repaired. This is what it means to take ground from the devil and to put there some feature of Christ, some aspect of grace: meekness for pride, kindness for hardness, love for bitterness, patience for impetuosity. In all -- Christ for self. Every one of us must know what "the sole of your feet" means unto breaking the enemy's power and increasing the measure of Christ.

This calls for courage, and this is where and how courage will be tested.

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