

Date: August 2, 2009

Title: God Is With You Wherever You Go

¹ After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant. He said,² "Moses my servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them."³ I promise you what I promised Moses: 'Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you—⁴ from the Negev wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, including all the land of the Hittites.'⁵ No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.⁶ "Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them."⁷ Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do.⁸ Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.⁹ This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Josh 1:1-9 (NLT)

My goodness, it certainly is nice to be out here in the park having this inspiring worship service. This is the first time, so far, that we have merged the two worship services and worshipped together as one body since we have begun the second service. And in order to do this we have migrated from our location outside of our building and come over here to the park to worship and then to share fellowship with each other after the service.

Have you every noticed how sometimes it is a good idea to get out of your everyday routine so that you can get a fresh look at what you have been doing? I know that it is possible to get so focused on the day-to-day items we have to deal with that we forget to take a moment to look up and see where we have been and where we might be going.

A really good example of this came one time a many years ago when I was working as a laborer on a project to replace all of the downtown sidewalks in Laramie, Wyoming, my hometown. We were pouring a new stretch of sidewalk; there were probably about ten men working on this process, a ready-mix truck delivering the concrete, tools everywhere and we were making a whole lot of noise. We were about 20 to 30 feet down the sidewalk when much to everyone's surprise a man who was walking down

the street coming our way failed to notice any of this and took about 4 steps into the freshly placed concrete. Of course the finishers were a little upset that the man put his footprints into the fresh concrete and they were going to have to fix it, but the man was really angry that there was no barricade to stop him from walking into wet cement. I think he believed that we had set a booby-trap for him. I'm sure a barricade would have been good, but the point is, the man was so much into his own world that he was unable to notice what was going on around and ahead of him.

I think that sort of thing can happen to a church as well. So, I think it is a great that today we can lift our heads up from what we have been doing, as we have been so busy 'Bearing Fruit for God' and take a look at what is going on around us and consider where God might want to lead us from here.

I don't know if it's just me or not, so I want to ask you folks, have you noticed that the world is changing? Most of us here take our bearings from events that happened in the 20th century; two world wars, technological advances that have outpaced science fiction novels, the rise and fall of the Soviet Union leaving us here in the US with a slight superiority complex when we are not careful.

And nearly as soon as this new millennium began, we were rocked by the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Our economic well-being has been threatened by what many call a near melt-down of the world's financial system. We used to view China as a very large developing country that had a lot of people and horrible human rights record. Now, when you look at a manufacturing tag made in China is the norm and our government owes an estimated 2-½ trillion dollars to the Chinese government. Scientists tell us that we are producing more carbon dioxide than the earth can safely tolerate and the weather patterns and melting polar ice-caps tell us that they are right.

Some of this stuff is hard to wrap your head around but just walking down the street you can see any number of body piercings, tattoos, different shades of hair color and clothing that make us want to say, "Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore.

I chose to use Joshua's proclamation because I think there are some similarities between where the Hebrews were at that point in their history and where we are in ours. The Hebrews had been wondering around in the

desert for forty years until finally the time was right for them to move across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Moses has been the leader of this group of God's chosen people, but he has died and now the Lord is talking to the new leader, Joshua.

We, of course are not camped on the banks of a river waiting to move into Promised Land, but if you would use your imagination perhaps you could think about the building we have vacated for this morning's service as mission central for all that God is calling us to be and do in the coming several years. We are not moving to a promised geographical land, but rather to a promised mission field that is not as far away as Nicaragua, but only as far away as our front door. We are not looking as the Hebrews from East to West, but rather from present to future. The Hebrews were getting ready to move across the Jordan River into a land filled with milk and honey, but it was also a land inhabited by people with different customs and religious ideas. God is promising Joshua to empower him and guide him, as they get ready to move into this strange land. I believe that God offers a similar promise to us as we are looking forward to a century that has already shown us how much the world is changing. Let's look at that promise now.

The first promise the Lord makes to Joshua is this. ***"Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you."*** Now, this may seem rather obvious, but I think that it is important for us to consider that wherever ***we*** go from here, we go because God is making a future for our church possible. God is not promising to give us land on which to live, but God is giving us *a future* and a *community* in which to live out our mission to ***Bear Fruit for God.***

We have not been literally wandering around in the desert for forty years, but we have had some desert moments in the last forty years. But now, we are poised and ready to move into a future that is God given and God empowered. I'm not saying that this future potential from God has not existed before now, actually, it has existed all along and will continue to exist. Our challenge is to boldly move into the future trusting that God will lead us and empower us in our mission.

Now, I'm going to loosely paraphrase God's words to Joshua as if they were being said to us right now: *"Wherever you find places to minister to your community and the world, you will be on the mission I have given to you."* And it continues: *"No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be*

with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you. "Be strong and courageous, for you are the ones who will take my love and grace into the future that I am setting before you.

Again, we are not looking forward to conquering a land in order to make our livelihood from it, but we are looking forward to accomplishing God's mission in our community and in the world as we spread the message of love and hope we find in our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Please, allow me to once again paraphrase God's words to Joshua so we can hear how closely they apply to us: *No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live in solid relationship with me. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail or abandon you. Be strong and courageous for each one of you has a part to play in the mission I am setting before you.* Do you hear the promise in this? Does it fill you with confidence? I have been from time to time in various workshops and retreats asked, "What would you do with your life if you knew you could not fail?" Well, in a way, this is the promise that we are receiving from God. No one will be able to stand against us for God will be with us as God was with Moses.

Now, right about now those of you who have read even just a little bit of the Old Testament might be raising your eyebrows and saying to yourselves, "Wait, just a minute here. I have read what happened and once they took over the land, they failed right and left. The subsequent history of the Hebrew people was a constant cycle of failure and repentance; failure and repentance; right up through Jesus' time." And, you are right about that. Joshua did not fail at his mission to lead God's chosen people into the Promised Land, but the failures after that are almost too numerous to count.

But there is one more part of the text that gives us some understanding of what happened. God tells Joshua: *. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do.⁸ Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.*

This is the one qualification that pretty well explains the problems that seemed to continually plague the Hebrews. *Study this book of instructions continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will obey everything written in it. Then you will be successful in everything you do.*

This is where the rubber meets the road. This is where the Hebrews, the Roman church, the protestant movement, the Church of England, the Methodist movement, and yours truly have all had issues. We read this “***if – then***” statement: ***If you follow my instructions – then you will be successful*** and we are able to look back at church history and say, “No wonder they had problems. They did pretty well for a while, but then the best of what they were doing seemed to disintegrate and turn to dust because they were not following instructions.”

So, we stand here looking across the imaginary river into the mission field God has promised and we hear God encourage us to be strong and courageous and not to be afraid or discouraged. And even though the world we have grown used to has changed; is changing; we stand here filled with excitement for all that God has been doing and is going to do with our lives and our church.

And if you all are like me, in the back of our minds we hear a little voice telling us that we, like all the others will not be able to follow instructions either. And the courage and confidence begins to waiver and we wonder if we really will be able to accomplish our mission.

To which I answer, “Of course we will! Of course we will!” we will not do everything perfect. We will make some mistakes. We will give our best at times, and other times our worst will slip out. But what is more important than any of this is the last verse of our scripture. This is the promise that comes regardless of what we do. This is our divine creator telling us not to worry because, “*the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.*” See this is the one promise that we can count on no matter what happens. We are almost guaranteed not to follow instructions with every action we take, but we know that we serve a God who loves us and cares for us even when we fail to follow instructions and have to live with the consequences.

Of course we need to pay attention to the instruction manual; yes, we do need to study the word of God so we can interpret it to the best of our ability; yes, we do need to recognize that God will from time-to-time ask us to do things that are unpleasant or will challenge us to move out of our comfort zones, but as we look over an imaginary river to a future that only God sees, no matter what, the promise that give us hope for that future and peace in the present is the same promise that God gave to Joshua: God is with you where ever you go. Amen.