

Finding Your Story in HIStory
A Place to Begin Again
Joshua 1:1-9

February 5, 2012

Dr. Steve Horn

Text Introduction: Indeed, I have been sharing with you this year that God has a plan for our lives. If we really want to discover our story, we will discover God's story. God desires relationship with us. That is proven in creation. Like Adam and Eve, we have rebelled and have run from that relationship. The story of history is that God has pursued us in relationship.

When we left the story last week, Moses, through God's divine intervention, had led the people out of slavery. God would bring them into the Land of Promise as it was beginning to be called. But as is so often the case, Israel, like we do so often, took a detour—a 40 year detour. Our reading today begins to tell us what happened next. God called a new leader—Joshua. After 40 years of detour, Israel is now ready to “begin again.”

Text: ¹ After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, who had served Moses: ² “Moses My servant is dead. Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan to the land I am giving the Israelites. ³ I have given you every place where the sole of your foot treads, just as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will be from the wilderness and Lebanon to the great Euphrates River—all the land of the Hittites—and west to the Mediterranean Sea. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or forsake you.

⁶ “Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I swore to their fathers to give them as an inheritance. ⁷ Above all, be strong and very courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. ⁸ This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to recite it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. ⁹ Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

Introduction: As I have thought these weeks about the big picture of God's dealing with us—His supreme work of creation—I have tried to think in terms of those broad sweeping movements of His activity. One of the things that I keep thinking about is how the story of God is a story of beginning again. Perfect creation gives way to sin. Rampant sin gives way to the flood, but through Noah's family, there is a beginning again. But not long after that beginning again, we read about the Tower of Babel—a time in ancient history when humanity did not want to scatter as God had said. Instead they desire to build a tower to get to God. God scattered these people, so there is another place of beginning again. If we fast forward to the time of Moses, God is going to bring the people into a land that will be their own, and through them, begin again. But this people rebelled and so they wander around in the wilderness for forty years. But, instead of letting them wander forever, God allowed, through Joshua, for this people to have a second chance—a place to begin again. This is not going to be the last time that we see a need to begin again, but it is a good place to explore this truth that God is and has always been a God of second (and third, fourth, fifth...) chances.

Let this truth sink deep within your soul. It does not matter who you are or what you have done, because of God's grace and by His grace, you can begin again. You might have arrived here this morning broke, broken, or broken-hearted, but you can begin again.

How Do We Begin Again? As always, let's allow the text to give us some guiding principles of how we can begin again.

Courage

Where does a person find courage?

- Awaken to the challenge before us.

Joshua did not have to be told that Moses was dead. He already knew that Moses was dead. He did need to face the reality of the challenge of Moses being dead. He did need to face the reality of his circumstances. Often times this is the very first step of someone beginning again.

- Acceptance of God's promise.

The same promise that God gave Moses is now being repeated to Joshua. The promise given so many years ago is realized in these chapters of the book of Joshua. A summary passage is 21:43-45, especially, verse 45, "Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled."

- Awareness of God's presence.
We find courage in God's presence.
- Alignment with God's Word.

Comparison

So, it takes courage to begin again. Sometimes we must compare obedience to disobedience in order to begin again. We see this in Joshua's story by comparing the Battle of Jericho with the Battle of Ai. The Battle of Jericho is the first conquest of the Promised Land. It is a rather interesting battle. We read about it in Joshua 6. God wanted to show Israel that He was giving victory through their obedience so He gave an interesting plan. He told Joshua to lead the army around the city one time for six consecutive days. Out in front of the army, God commanded there to be seven priests carrying trumpets. Then, on the seventh day, God told them to march around the city seven times. Then God commanded them to blow those trumpets and for the people to shout. When this happened, the walls of Jericho fell and Israel captured the city.

The Battle of Ai in chapter 7 shows the result of disobedience. Ai was not nearly as large as Jericho. As a result, the people of Israel decided their own battle plan which included only sending a few thousand men to the battle. Their defeat was great. In reality the defeat was the result of disobedience. God had directed Israel about the plunder from the war and what they could keep and what they could not keep. One man, Achan, took some of the forbidden things. This disobedience caused defeat. We talked last week about the power of one in a positive way. Today, we need to consider the power of one in a negative way.

Here's the comparison: Obedience leads to victory; disobedience leads to defeat. (Cf. 2:24 and 7:5)

²⁴ They told Joshua, “The LORD has handed over the entire land to us. Everyone who lives in the land is also panicking because of us.” (2:24)

⁵ The men of Ai struck down about 36 of them and chased them from outside the gate to the quarries, striking them down on the descent. As a result, the people’s hearts melted and became like water. (7:5)

Commitment

Throughout Joshua’s ministry there is a continued emphasis on renewing the commitment to God’s covenant. In chapter 3 this is called consecration. (3:5) In chapter 5, this is through circumcision. At the end of the book, this takes the form of a ceremony. Joshua actually spoke in terms of the difficulty of keeping the commitment. Joshua insisted upon the removal of any foreign god that would keep Israel from keeping the commitment. We must understand the same in beginning again. Your second chance is a call for your commitment. God’s invitation for a second chance is not an invitation for another denial, another failure, but rather a new commitment.

Choice

To begin again, we must choose to begin again. The Bible is a record of choices. That’s why Joshua declares in Joshua 24:15, “Choose you this day who you will serve.” The Bible is filled with the idea of personal freedom. In the Garden of Eden, God set forth a choice to Adam and Eve. Nothing has ever changed that. We must keep the Sovereignty of God and the free choice of humanity in perfect balance. This is why Jesus said, “Enter through the narrow gate.”

Ultimately, we realize that in God’s story, we begin again at the Cross.

The often-quoted poet, Anonymous wrote:

*I wish there was some wonderful place
Called the Land of begin again.
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
and all our poor selfish griefs
Could be cast like a shabby old coat at the door
And never be put on again
I wish there was some wonderful place
Called the Land of begin again.*

Well, Mr. Anonymous, that place does in fact exist. That place is the cross. Once Jesus said, “Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28) Doesn’t that sound good? Rest? You might have arrived here this morning broke, broken, or broken-hearted, but you can begin again.

Like Bob (reference back to Bob Rayburn’s testimony), this is your birthday, this is your phone call, this is your place to begin again.