

Conquest

THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE

Sermon 1: Joshua: How to Succeed

Joshua 1

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- May 3, 2020

Video link to the Bible Project: Joshua

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqOqJlFF_eU

The Book of Joshua ... let's back up and remember the story so far. God chose Abraham, and then his family became the people of Israel, who are then enslaved down in Egypt. And so, through Moses, God rescued Israel out of Egypt. He made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai and He brought them through the wilderness. So, Israel encamped outside the promised land, and then Moses called them to obey God's command so that they could show all the other nations what God is like.

The Book of Joshua picks up right after Moses has died and Israel is ready to enter the land. So, the story of Joshua is designed with four main movements. Joshua first leads Israel into the promised land, and then once they're there they meet all this hostility from the Canaanites, and so they engage them in battle. Then after their victories Joshua divides up the promised land as the inheritance for the twelve tribes. And then the book concludes with these final speeches that Joshua gives to the people.

Well, good morning, Grace! I don't know if you've said it out loud, but here it is. Thank God it's May! I mean, really, thank God. We had thirty April Fool's days in a row. That was a rough month. But here we are in May. And we're returning to our Bible reading program. We're reading through the Bible with Grace Covenant Church together and you can still join us if you'd like to do that. We're looking at how God has worked in human history to bring us back to the

way that we were designed; to bring us back to an intimate relationship with God. In a word, it's salvation. In two words, it's called the abundant life. And the abundant life is having a transcendent, personal, vulnerable relationship with God. It is experiencing the presence of God in good times and in times of great hardship.

The abundant life – it's what we're going to be studying today. Because when we look at the Book of Joshua – that's where we are in our storyline – Joshua has a formula for the abundant life. Joshua's experience here – in the whole book itself he's going to give the formula for the abundant life, and then the rest of the book he's going to demonstrate how that formula plays out. If Joshua had had a subtitle for a book cover, the subtitle would be *How to Have a Successful Life*. This is successful living.

The context of the Book of Joshua is that the nation of Israel is changing. They're going into a new arena of life. They're having a new season of life. They're going into the promised land. And while they're making that transition that is somewhat fearful, it is helpful for us when we make transitions. We go through, what, seven seasons of life? We go through different phases of life, different arenas, whether you're a student or married or have children or have a career transition, single again, or maybe moving into retirement. Each one of these new seasons, new arenas, they bring about new challenges. And the fear and the pressure that's involved in each one of them make it ripe for us to fail. But at Grace, we don't live that way. We live to thrive, in all contexts, in all arenas, in all seasons of life. Because while the seasons might change, the formula doesn't. While the arena of life we're living in could adapt, you don't have to adapt this formula. This is how we are to thrive.

And it's a good thing you're here today, because we're going to look at that formula. There is no clearer, more succinct place in the Bible that spells out how we're to live our life than in the Book of Joshua. And there's no more obvious expression of that displayed than in the Book of Joshua. Let me tell you how the Book of Joshua starts. In Joshua 1:1, the very first sentence of Joshua says, "Now after the death of Moses the servant of YHWH, God comes to Joshua and says to him, 'Joshua, now that Moses my servant is dead, do this. Rise up and take my people into the land that I have promised.'" *Let's go. Let's live this life out. Let's live the abundant life.*

Joshua 1:5

“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.”

Here’s the formula. By the way, here’s the confidence He gives him in verse 5: “No one will be able to stand up against you in all the days of your life. As it was with Moses, I will be with you; I will never leave you and I will never forsake you.”

Joshua 1:6-9

“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. ⁷ Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for YHSH your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Grace, this week, in chapter 1, verses 6 through 9, you’re going to see the formula for how to live a successful life. Here’s what I’d like us to do as a church challenge. Let’s memorize verse 6 through 9 together this week. Verse 6 through 9 --- here it is; here’s how to live a great life. I’ll read. It says, “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land which I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful in whatever you do.”

And then he repeats it, kind of in a negative way. “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything that is written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be

strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged ...” Why? “... for YHWH your God will be with you wherever you go.”

How to Succeed: Have the Courage to Obey

There it is, Grace. There is the formula for success: the courage to obey. It happens and works in every context, every arena, every season of life. It is simple – it’s not easy. But it’s really just two parts, two points there in verses 6 through 9, and they’re repeated over and over again – two parts.

1. Understand the Directions

One: understand the directions. You have to know them and you have to understand the Word of God. That’s what he says. He says, “Do not let this Book depart from your lips. Meditate on it day and night. Part one: understand the directions.

2. Have the Courage to Do the Directions

Part two: you have to have the courage to do the directions. “Be strong and courageous. Have I not told you to be strong and very courageous?” There it is. There’s the formula – courageous obedience.

And courageous obedience is the formula for success. Here’s why it works. I’m always asking why. Here’s why it works. When a person lives a courageous, obedient life, serving the Lord in all that he does, obeying all the commands, what you’re doing is you’re living in harmony with the definition of all things created; and, more importantly, in the very definition of who God is. Because when you live a courageous, obedient life, it is showing that you are submitting to the way God is defined. And God is defined by these titles. He is the Lord and He is the King and He is the ruler, He is the sovereign. And when we live a life underneath the submission to that king, that Lord, that sovereign, it just shows that we’re obeying the King.

And listen – don’t get me wrong. He’s not just the Lord, He’s the Lord of Lords. He’s not just a king, He’s the King of all Kings. And these aren’t just titles. Again, these are definitions. These are facts about Him. So, when a person lives a courageous, obedient life, the reason they’re successful is that they are following the rules of the ruler. Of course, you’ll be successful.

Courageous Obedience is Lordship

In a word, in a single word, courageous obedience is the word “lordship.” And that’s the key here. Success in every area of our life is the idea that God is Lord in every area of our life, whether we’re in school or maybe in college, or our family life or our career life. Lordship means we are putting on display to all the created world, the seen and unseen world, that YHWH rules all parts of our lives. We are in obedience in all of life. When we become like Christ in all of life, it is becoming obedient in all of life, courageously obedient, obeying all of His commands.

Joshua 1:8

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

And that’s why it says in chapter 1, verse 8 --- this is what lordship means – “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth. Meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you’ll be prosperous and then you will have success.”

How you see God is the most important aspect of your life. How do you view God? Because a lot of people view God as a helper, an adviser, someone that’s even sometimes like a cheerleader, and they seek God to influence them, to advise them, to care for them when they’re down, to strengthen them when they’re discouraged. And most importantly, God is there to escort us into heaven to have eternal life with Him.

Now, listen ... God actually want to do all those things. But that’s what He does. That’s not who He is. Who He is, is Lord. He is the King. He rules. And He wants to do those things for us, but you have to agree with who He is on His terms, by the definition of real things. And He’s king. And we talk about Jesus. We say that He’s the Lord Jesus Christ. You can’t just take some of those words and leave some out, like it’s some Spotify playlist. *I like the Jesus part and I like the Christ part, that He’s the promised one, but the Lord ... yeah, I’m going to take that off the shuffle list there.* That’s not how the world works. That’s not how success happens. He is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what lordship means is to courageously obey, courageously trust, courageously depend upon God, not just in areas where we're not afraid, where we're confident, where we've grown, in areas where we're pretty sure of ourselves; but especially, courageous obedience is required in the places where we're afraid. That's when it shows up. When we're clinging to something, instead of releasing to lordship, we're clinging to something that allows us to get the impression that we're safe or that we're secure or we're holding onto something that matters, maybe too much, to us. It matters more than lordship matters to us.

I mean, it's pretty easy for this to show up in parts of our lives where we're afraid. Sometimes it's in a habit of life where we like that habit and we don't like God to take it away – we're afraid of what might happen if we weren't to practice that habit. Sometimes it happens in relationships, particularly ones that are significant, like in marriage or in singleness, for example. You know, I can see people that have a context of lordship in almost every aspect of their life, but when it comes to dating and finding a mate, it's this: *You know what? You've got to do what you've got to do.* That's not lordship. In marriage --- you know, obedience is pretty clear and defined if you know it and understand it. It's the courage to obey that's required in a marriage. And a lot of times people say, *Yeah, in these other areas of my life, He's Lord, but when it comes to getting what I want, manipulation has worked okay so far.* That's not lordship.

In children and parenting, sometimes that has to do with not having lordship in that area. Sometimes that has to do with the value that we place on our children. And it's a good value. But that's not the way that we're supposed to live. We're supposed to live courageously. And I know, helicopter parenting wasn't invented in the Church, but I think it was perfected here, especially in the American evangelical church. We want to control those things about which God says, *Release those to me and you can live a successful life. Then you will be abundant. You will have the abundant experience.*

And again, sometimes in the context of our calling Jesus Christ "Lord", our finances are not under His lordship. In all these other little areas of our lives, integrity exudes, but when it comes to money, we hold onto it. And I think sometimes it's not because people are stingy; I think it's because that's where we find our safety, sometimes our security. And in some people's lives, that's where their identity is.

And here's the point. Lordship, the word itself, doesn't allow you to take some of those things and leave them out. It doesn't permit it. He is Lord of all or He is not Lord at all, is the

phrase. He is Lord of all or He is not Lord of all. And Jesus doesn't want to be part of your life; He wants to take control of all of your life. And I want to remind you why: because that's where you'll find success. It's a trade up to absolutely surrender to His lordship. You can't find passages in the Bible where whoever the spokesperson is, a prophet or Moses or Jesus Christ himself, where he says, *Oh, you have to sacrifice for me. No, no, there's a cost for following me, there's a cost for discipleship – absolutely.* And it's somewhat expensive at times. But it's never a downgrade. It's always for something better. It's always for something more.

In Joshua's case, he wants them to obey. All that was commanded of them through Moses – they're supposed to obey all of those things. Why? So they can live in the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey, so they can be free and enjoy that freedom.

When C. S. Lewis describes this in *Mere Christianity*, again, he's being somewhat playful here. He says that when you ask Jesus to come into your life and to take over your life, you do that quite often because you have some problems that you need to solve and you want Him to do that. You want Him to serve you. And that's great. But here's the thing – He's the King. He's the Lord. And Lewis says, it would be like asking Jesus to come and move in with you and He's like a general contractor. And your life is your house. And He comes in and you're happy that He fixed the leaky faucet and now the roof is fixed and now the sinks aren't clogged so much anymore. And then all of a sudden, He starts moving things around and it hurts you – *Owww!* And that's not where it ends. It's a great story, it's a great metaphor. He starts rearranging all sorts of things in your cute little cabin. And you don't like that.

Here's what lordship means in this metaphor. You think, *What on earth is He up to?* The explanation is this: that He's building quite a different house than the one you thought of, and He's throwing out a new wing here and putting in an extra floor there, and then He's running towers and courtyards. And you thought that He was just going to do some decent things to your cute little cottage. But that's not what He has in mind. He's building a palace, because it's His intent to live there Himself. Yeah. He wants you to courageously obey, to let go of those things, especially in those areas where you're most afraid, not so that you suffer, but so that you thrive, so that you'll enjoy success in life.

God has a much better plan for Joshua in this story, so all they have to do is surrender. God has a much better plan for us and we must surrender. We must surrender to His lordship, and lordship means everything.

Let's look closer at that formula for success. Remember, it's to courageously obey, and there are two parts to that. One is to understand the directions and the other part is to courageously do the directions.

Formula for Success

1. Understand the Directions

Understanding the directions – it means that you need to learn the Bible for what it says, and that's basic Bible teaching, so that you know the storyline. And then you need to understand what the Bible says. Now that's different. That's what it means. That's the idea of how it applies and learning how it applies. At Grace, we do that. That's why we're a Bible teaching church. That's why we're going through a year in the Bible, so that you get the big picture of God's character and what His will is. We have so many learning opportunities in this church, from the children all the way up to those who are retired. We continually train our teachers that are teaching in these various venues so that they can learn not just to teach what the Bible says, but what it means and how it applies in our lives. Because we believe that every believer's a minister here, and every believer needs to understand what their Bible says. That's why I would like all of us to join together as a church and memorize chapter 1, verses 6 through 9, so that we'll have that in our minds, meditating on it, that formula.

Formula for Success

2. Have the Courage to Do the Directions

The formula for success -- understand what the Bible says, understand the directions. Part two: have the courage to do the directions, the courage to obey. There it is. There's the rub. Because inside of us, we're all Hobbits. We're trying to get through life safe and secure and hopefully not having much adrenaline in our experience. Strong and courageous – it's used four times just in this chapter, just right here. And here's why. Because courage is the foundation of all the virtues. If you have these virtues without courage, you don't experience the virtues. You have to have the courage to do it.

When I was in college, I spent a year amateur boxing. It's called Golden Gloves. And it's kind of a picture of the metaphor here for the need for courage. Because the first couple of weeks

you just stand in front of a mirror and you just kind of box in front of the mirror. Shadow boxing – that’s kind of like what it says, boxing says – that’s not boxing. And then eventually you end up getting wrist wraps and you start hitting the heavy bag. The heavy bag – that’s what it means. There’s a lot of pain in hitting the heavy bag. But you know what? You’re still not boxing. You’re not boxing until you go into that ring and some guy’s punching back. That’s real boxing. And it’s amazing – you can go to some boxing gyms today and you’ll see some people – it’s amazing how slowly people can wrap their wrists with that support, because they are trying so hard to wait until it’s out of time. *I’m sorry, I so wanted to get into that ring, but we ran out of time again, coach, again, today.* Because that’s the problem with boxing – getting in the ring. That’s where you need courage to obey.

So, that’s kind of a metaphor here. We can know the Bible, we can even understand the Bible, but we have to have courage to make it happen. Lordship is understanding the Bible and having the courage to obey it. And since courage is this foundation for virtues and the successful life, I thought I’d spend a little time looking at the passage here to show us two ways of gaining courage – how to be courageous.

How to Be Courageous

1. Decide Ahead

One: decide ahead of time. You decide ahead. You have to resolve when you’re not in the moment of fear that you will obey. And that’s what Joshua does. Chapter 1: he looks at how to succeed, to be strong and courageous and to obey all the law, and he just resolves, *We are going to obey. That’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to do that.*

I have found that you have to resolve in life. When you have to make a hard decision, you have to make the hard decision before the decision needs to be implemented.

Here’s kind of a funny story. When I was a junior in high school, my parents inherited some money. And they said, “Hey, listen, we were thinking about putting in a swimming pool in the backyard. Would you guys swim in it? Would you use it much?”

And I said, “I’ll swim in it every single day.” I hadn’t heard that figure of speech *Never make promises when you’re happy and never make decisions when you’re sad.* I made a promise when I was really happy. I thought we were going to get a pool. And we did. But I promised and I made that decision ahead of time. I said, “I will swim in that pool every day.” So, in the

morning I'd wake up, before I went to high school, before I went to class. I'd run downstairs -- and oddly enough, I would decide because I'd decided ahead of time -- I'd run downstairs out back, I would touch the fence, and then once I touched that fence, I would run across the rest of that yard and jump in the pool and swim across, and then I'd swim that day. It was pretty fun in August and September. But October, November, December, it got so cold. Then I started realizing that I needed to decide way ahead of time. I would sleep in my swimsuit. And I knew that if I touched that fence I'd have to swim across the pool. And so, there were some days that were especially cold. And our pool wasn't heated -- just keep that in mind. I'd go downstairs and I'd just go to the fence and I'd stand there, almost touching the fence. I'm so cold outside, my mom was yelling at me through the window, "Just touch the fence." Touch the fence, run across the yard, jump in the pool, swim across, done. I swam in that pool every day that year, because I decided ahead of time. I made a plan. I made the plan before it got cold. That's how you succeed here.

I still do that today, by the way. I wake up every day, I've got an old business card -- this just works for me, I have to write it down -- the phone thing doesn't work -- I get an old business card and I write down my to-do things. Because sometimes it's not just for productivity. Sometimes it has to do with courage. I'll show this to you -- maybe we'll zoom in on this later on. And then if it turns into a long-term to-do, a courageous thing, I put it in this notebook, and I carry that around with me as well. The point is that I learned early on that you have to decide ahead if you want to be courageous, and I'm still doing that today.

How to Be Courageous

2. YHWH Is with You

Joshua 1:5, 9

“ ... as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

’ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for YHWH your God will be with you wherever you go.”

How are you going to be courageous? How are you going to live this way? The first thing is to decide ahead of time, and the second way is to understand that YHWH is with you. How does God answer the problem of this adventure for Joshua as an ulcer-breeding project for him? How does God say to Joshua, *Look, I know you’re going to have these impulses to retreat – don’t. Stand there. Fight the good fight.* What does He do? God says, *I am with you, from beginning to the end.* Look at verse 5 and then we’ll cut to 9. “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you.” And then at the end of the great formula here for success: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged ...” Why? “ ... for YHWH your God will be with you wherever you go.”

You know, so many of us have been told by well-meaning people in our lives, like maybe our parents or a counselor or some podcast, that you get confidence and courage by seeking within. It’s within you. You’re so special and you’re so awesome. And that’s not what happens in the Bible here. Confidence and courage are not found in you. They are found from seeking and seeing who is next to you --- the presence of God – who is beside you. The presence of God, the persistent, repetitious reason that we are to be courageous from the beginning of the Bible to the end; every expression of *You need to be courageous* is followed with *You won’t be alone. YHWH your God will be there.* He is there in the battle. He is there in the classroom. He’s in board rooms, He’s in hospital beds, He’s in death camps. He’s in the fire with us.

And in the story here, in Joshua's story – it's a beautiful story, because after Moses dies, it's time for this new generation, this Joshua generation, to take up the courageous sword. And how does God express His presence with them? If you read the story, you'll see in the early chapters that He has them cross the Jordan River, and they have a miraculous crossing that is just like the Red Sea. And God's saying, *Look, I'm with you. I made this creation, this creation serves me. The winds and the waves obey me. I'm with you.*

And then later on, they have their Passover in the promised land. Then all the men are circumcised so they would remember, *You belong to God.* Boy, there's a memory tool for you.

You know, if you were to visit some old saint's house and just ask them for a home tour, have them point out to you all the little trinkets – I don't know, on their shelves or by their bed, around the house --- and I bet each of those trinkets has a story, a God story, where they said, *Yes, I was required to be strong and courageous in order to obey. And I realized the presence of God and I was able to do those things.* We all need memories, memory tokens, to help us remember the presence of God in times of needs. The most repeated command in the Bible is this: Fear not. And it's repeated 366 times, one for each day, even on Leap Year. Fear not. Why? Because God is with you.

So, listen. The next time you enter a place of fear, when you touch that doorknob, before you go in, you say, "Lord, I know You're present. Will You make Your presence obvious to me so that I might be courageously obedient to You?" Watch how He responds.

Courage to Obey: Jericho

This story in the Book of Joshua – that's the formula for success. The rest of the book is examples of how it's played out. And what I'd like to do is just tell you one quick story and see how we can apply the need for courageous in our lives as it was in Joshua's life.

The first story is one that you probably know and that's the story of Jericho. That's their first city to conquer. And as you might know, the point of the story is to show these people that God is with them, that the battle belongs to the Lord, that He does the heavy lifting. And the city of Jericho was famous for its fortified city, it being one of the stronger ones in the entire region. We know from archaeology that the walls themselves are probably wide enough to handle two chariots, so it's a two-lane road. That's how thick and dense and how high it must have been.

And listen, don't get me wrong. Israel could have conquered Jericho. In my understanding, they had 3,000 soldiers. They could have overwhelmed them in a traditional way at the loss of lives and a great amount of time. But that's not the story.

Here's the story. God says this to Joshua to tell the men. He says, *Look. What are you going to do? For six days I want you guys to line up and each day, one time just walk around the walls of Jericho. And do that once again the next day, for six days. And then on the seventh day - the Ark of the Covenant is leading that whole parade – and on the seventh day I want the priests to bring trumpets, and then you'll circle it seven times. And on the seventh time everybody shout and blow the trumpets and I'll take it from there. You just wait and watch. I'll do the heavy lifting.*

Courage to Obey: Why?

That's the story. If you can imagine, Joshua's like a General George Patton. He's a man of great ability in the battlefield, and strategy. And he has to come and tell his troops this message of conquest? How odd it must have been. What's the point? The point is this. That they needed, like we need, to learn how to be courageous when we want to say *Why?* Courageous obedience in the why. I don't know why God wants me to do this. I don't know why God has me experiencing whatever it might be – usually it's evil stuff. God sets this story up in such a way that you have to obey Him when you don't know the reason. And that's very hard to obey. Because I think if I don't know the reason for something, it helps me stay courageous and obedient. And this story, marching around those walls for six days, even the seventh day, nothing happens. It doesn't cause the walls to rattle or anything.

Imagine these guys coming home each night and the family's sitting around saying, *Yeah, Dad, tell us what happened today!*

Uhh ... we just marched around the wall.

Right ... reconnaissance, right? Like you're serving, you're taking strategic places of conquest of entry, right?

Uhh ... yeah. That's what we did.

Day two. More reconnaissance?

Day three. Still just march around.

Four, five, six. *Dad, are you guys afraid? Why are you just walking around in circles? Why don't you guys do something?*

I don't know. I'm just doing what I'm told. I don't have to have a reason why.

And then day six, he says, *Wait – here's the deal. Joshua said for the priests to bring trumpets tomorrow. So, tomorrow's going to be different, family – we'll see.*

And it was. For six days all he talked about was what and why. But day seven, after that seventh lap, all they talked about was how it's a God thing. God did the heavy lifting.

Why Did God Choose This Way?

The point is, why would God have them do this, this way? Because God wasn't concerned about what He was going to do through them. He was concerned about what was going on in them. He was training them to be prepared to enter the promised land, to be dependent upon Him and obedient. The value wasn't the outcome; the value and the focus was their obedience. Because the outcome was God's responsibility; courageous obedience when you don't the answer to the question *Why?* – that's their responsibility. That's our responsibility.

Yes, this is absolutely a Mr. Miyagi kind of way of learning to obey --- wax on, wax off. Why? Just do it. Paint the fence. Sand the deck. I just want to see if you can courageously obey me when you don't have the answer why. That's what this story is about – it's courageous obedience when you don't know why, so that God will do the heavy lifting in your life. Are you living in a world where you don't know why and maybe in your parenting or in your job and work ethic and speaking highly of your boss, and you don't know why? Faithfully praying for someone and you're wondering, *Why isn't this working?* That's what courage is in obedience, is doing it when you don't know why.

Courage to Obey: How Long? Endurance

The other part of this story that helps us in our obedience and courage is when we have to be courageously obeying when we don't know how long. So much of faith is just waiting. If you look at the storyline up to this point, Abraham waited twenty-five years, Joseph waited – I don't know – fifteen to twenty-five years, Moses waited forty years and then another forty years. How long? How long – circling the walls for one more day and one more day and one more day.

Courageous obedience requires endurance. And sometimes that's difficult, but that's the definition of lordship in our sickness or our singleness or our infertility, in our waiting for that promotion – whatever it might be.

Summary

The point is this. This story sets us up for a real practical application of what it means to be courageously obedient. Courageous obedience means when you don't know why and you don't know how long. This story itself is a failure of a story for six days, if they leave any time in those six days, if they give up because they don't know why or they don't know how long. You know what? It's a failure story on day seven on lap twelve. Nothing happens until day seven, lap seven. On the seventh lap the trumpets blow, the walls come down. And they have a great story of success, and why? Because they followed the formula – they just followed the formula. And the formula is just to understand what the rules are, understand the directions, and then have the courage to do the directions. Several times I'm sure those guys were thinking, *What? I'm just going to obey.* You might need this kind of encouragement to have a talk with someone – I don't know – to break up a relationship or to restore a friendship, to come clean with a sin. I don't know, but this message is for everyone that's living a real Christian life. You have to decide ahead of time and you have to sense the presence of God with you. YHWH will never leave you and will never forsake you.

Christianity has not so much been tried and found wanting; it's been found difficult and left untried.

■ **G. K. Chesterton**

Here's the thing about the Christian life, the real Christian life, the abundant Christian life. G. K. Chesterton put it this way: "Christianity has not so much been tried and found wanting; it's been found difficult and left untried."

It's just that so many people give up because they have to know why or they have to know how long, or they're not going to trust His lordship in an area that is too important to them or significant in their life. Or they're too afraid to. And yeah, there's a cost to that, but listen, friends, listen. There's a cost for discipleship; but there's a cost for walking away. There's a cost

for giving up on the fourth day or the sixth day or the seventh day, sixth lap. There's a cost for that. There's a cost for compromise, and it's so much more than the cost of obedience.

It costs a man just as much or even more to go to hell than it does to go to heaven. Narrow, exceedingly narrow is the way to perdition!"

--- Søren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard said it this way: "It costs a man just as much or even more to go to hell than it does to go to heaven. Narrow, exceedingly narrow is the way to perdition!"

There's a cost for pride and holding on to pride. There's a cost for fear and being stubborn and holding on to stubbornness, year after year, decade after decade. There are crushing burdens when we're living a life that's duplicitous. There are consequences to our own souls and to all the people we touch, especially those we love the most. Don't you know? If you don't live the courageous, obedient life, those who you love the most pay the most. There's a cost for lordship; there's a much higher cost for rejection of that lordship. There's a cost for discipleship, but the return is so much more. The easiest, fastest, surest, best way to live life is to be completely surrendered to the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the ruler, the maker of all things, the sovereign.

Challenge: Rededication

Joshua closes with a challenge. In chapter 24 of Joshua it's all over and they have settled in the land. And Joshua says this – it's a rededication of going forward. *Will you be courageous? Will you be obedient?* And in that it's a beautiful outline in the literary style. He's making another covenant with them, He's renewing the covenant that was made in Palestine and at Mount Sinai. And God starts that covenant renewal with all that God has done for them, and the point of that, the reason I'm bringing it up, is that seventeen times – seventeen times – God says, *I was with you and I did the heavy lifting. I was with you. I did the heavy lifting. So, hey, be strong and courageous. Meditate on these words day and night, so that you might be sure and*

certain that you will obey all that I've commanded you. Then you'll be prosperous. Then you'll be successful.

Joshua 24:14-15

“Now fear the LORD and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve YHWH. ¹⁵ But if serving YHWH seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

And the book ends like this. “Now fear YHWH and serve Him in all faithfulness. Throw away all the gods that your forefathers worshiped over there beyond the River in Egypt. Only serve YHWH. But if serving YHWH seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourself this day whom you will serve, whether the gods of your forefathers on the other side of that River, or the gods of the land that you're about to inherit here. But as for me and my house, we're going to serve YHWH.”

Look what he just did. He decided ahead of time. He's betting on the presence of God. He's saying, *As for me and my house, we're going to live a courageous, obedient life, because that's the formula for success.*

How about you, Grace? How about you make a pledge right now? Decide now to be courageously obedient. If we can be a courageous, obedient church – I think we are – but individually – wow! What an impact we could make on our neighbors and the world as we guide people to become like Christ in all of life.

We are not here to survive. We are here to thrive. Jesus never said, “I have come that you might have life and survive it.” He came and said, “I came that you might have life and might have it abundantly, the fullness of everything we could have this side of the garden.” Let's pray to that end, okay?

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we are so grateful that Your Bible is Holy Writ, that You have written down for us what the commands are and how we are to live our lives. And in that living of our lives, it requires courage. And God, I'd ask that You would cause us – cut our hearts deep where we are not being courageous. The reason we're choosing not to obey You in an area of life is because we need courage. We need to decide to obey. We need to feel Your presence in those moments so that we can live that obedient life to glorify You so that our life could be a display, like this whole Book of Joshua is. Our life could be a display to all created things, seen and unseen, that You are the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the great sovereign ruler of all creation. If nowhere else, in our life – in our life and our choice. God, let us be a church filled with people, little people and young people and old people, filled with men and women who thrive because they have determined this formula for success is from You. It defines You as Lord. I pray that we would live that life. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.