

Sunday Morning Message

March 15, 2020

Replace Your Fears with Faith

Text – Joshua 1:1 - 9

Congregational Reading – Joshua 1:6 - 9

Introduction

Read Joshua 1:1 – 9; 16 - 18

Four times in our text, we see the commanded from the Lord to Joshua and all of the congregation of Israel to “*be strong and of a good courage*” (vs. 6, 9, and 18), or “*be thou strong and very courageous*” (v. 7).

It is very much the nature of humanity to be afraid when the situations in our lives get beyond our control. Our nation and our world is in the midst of a very scary situation with this Covid-19 virus spreading rapidly, causing many to become very sick, and some are even dying. The world is very afraid, and unfortunately many Christians are fearful as well. While we certainly should be concerned about the welfare of our world, especially the health of our communities and families, we cannot let our concerns pass over to the point where they become paralyzing and unproductive fears.

One of the most oft repeated commandments in the Scripture is to “fear not,” which appears 63 times. The phrase “be not afraid” appears 28 times. God does not want us to live in fear even when faced with very troubling and uncertain times.

In our text today we see a very anxious Nation of Israel who has wandered in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula for some forty years, and is about to cross over the Jordan River and enter into their land that was promised to them by the Lord, a land that they knew flowed “with milk and honey.” The problem was that the land was also filled with inhabitants that were big and strong, and powerful; and they were not going to go down or move out without a fight. Possibly adding to Israel’s anxiety was the fact that Moses, their leader of forty years was now dead, and was replaced by his much younger “minister,” Joshua.

Israel had already been in this very same position forty years earlier, but because of their paralyzing fear, they refused to trust God and move into the land that God had prepared for them (Read Numbers 13:26 – 14:10).

After spying out the land, ten of the twelve spies came back and painted a picture of despair to the rest of the congregation causing them to doubt whether God was able to do what He promised to do.

Practical Point – Christian – be careful that your words in the middle of this crisis do not add to the fears of the people around you. Instead of being a news reporter spewing out all of the gossip and misinformation that is flying around on social media, why don’t you remind people that there is a God in Heaven who still on the throne and is sovereign over this world, and is working through this crisis and ultimately will fulfil His plan.

The congregation of Israel let their fears cripple their faith, and then refused to move in and possess the good land that God was giving them. They took their eyes off of God and instead focused on their problems.

Peter did the same thing (Read Matthew 14:24 – 32). When Peter's focus was on the Lord, he was able to follow the Lord and walk on water, but the minute he took his eyes off of God he became paralyzed with fear.

Transition – My Brothers and Sisters, please do not let your concern about what is going on in our world paralyze you with fear so that you cannot be the salt and light that God expects you to be in the midst of a very nervous and unsettled world.

What can we do that will help us to be strong and of good courage in the middle of the this corona virus crisis?

I. Look to the Word of God (v. 8)

It is certainly no accident that in the middle of two commandments to be strong and of good courage, there is a reminder about the importance of being in the word of God.

If there was ever a time for God's people to be in the Book, it is now.

Let's spend less time watching the news, and less time on social media, and let's spend more time in God's Word.

Joke - The Bible has the answers you need, even particular answers for this crisis:

*"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. **Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.**" (James 4:8)*

Seriously, the Bible has the answers we need.

Spending time in the Word of God will alleviate your fears.

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)

Faith is the polar opposite of fear. Faith is strengthened through the Word of God.

The Bible will light your way as you navigate through this crisis:

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105)

The Bible will remind you that God is with you.

God told Joshua:

"as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." (Joshua 1:5)

The writer to the Hebrews reminded us of this promise and broadened it to apply to all believers:

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Hebrews 13:5)

Jesus said:

"... I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:20)

The Bible will assure that God already knows the future:

God told us that there would be pestilences in the end times:

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places." (Matthew 24:7)

God already knew what is happening in our world today. He told us what is coming. Let's not be too surprised when it all happens.

II. Live Responsibly

Because you have faith, doesn't mean you can be foolish.

Satan tried to get Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the temple (Matthew 4:5 – 7). He told Jesus that the God would protect Him. What did Jesus say:

*"Jesus said unto him, It is written again, **Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.**"* (Matthew 4:7)

Don't tempt God by being foolish:

Take all of the necessary precautions.

Stay healthy: eat right, take your vitamins, get enough rest, exercise.

Wash your hands frequently.

Observe the social distancing recommendations. Try not to get too close to people.

All of that stuff is good. However, we must not let these good precautions cause us to get to a place where we are disobeying God's clear command to gather together.

Jesus told us that there would be pestilences in the end times, yet He also said that we were not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and then he added *"so much the more as ye see the day approaching"* (Hebrews 10:25).

Illustrate – many churches are cancelling services. Some are cancelling the smaller gatherings (Sunday evening and mid-week). Some are shutting down their busses. I absolutely do not want to do any of those things. I think this is a time where we can safely draw closer to God. I think it is also a time when lost people are going to looking God and His churches for answers and help.

We have prayed and given careful consideration as to what we should do about church services during this pandemic. We believe that God wants us to continue having services.

We have taken some additional measures to make it safer:

1. We have added additional seating to allow people to spread out.
2. We are trying to avoid too much close personal contact.
3. We are recommending that anybody who is even slightly sick stay home.
4. The ladies (and some of the men) spent several hours yesterday scrubbing down and sanitizing the building.

We are trying to be faithful to the Lord without being foolish.

We are even developing ways to be more creative through the website and social media. Even if we are forced to limit our physical interaction, there will be ways that we can stay connected through the website and social media.

III. Light Up Your World

If there was ever a time for Christians to be the light of the world, it is today.

Instead of spreading the misinformation and gossip to people, adding to their fears, let's give people what we know is the Truth – the Word of God.

This crisis is a perfect opportunity for us to be a light. People are scared. We know that God is in control, and we also know that whatever happens to us on this earth, we have a pestilence-free home awaiting us in Heaven.

Look for opportunities to share Christ with people.

Mordecai reminded Esther that God had raised her up and brought her into the palace of the King for "such a time as this:"

"Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13-14)

Like Esther, God has placed you here in this place, in 2020, in the middle of a world-wide pandemic, to be a source of strength and unwavering faith.

Let them see that you are not afraid; that you are trusting the Lord whatever the outcome.

Illustrate – My mom – she is ushering today at her Presbyterian church. She is not afraid. She believes that it is all in God's hands.

Conclusion

The Israelites overcame their fears and trusted the Lord to bring them into the Promised Land and to overcome all of the obstacles associated with conquering the giants in the land. They faced their fears, and acted in faith.

This world needs to know and see that there are people here who are not living in fear. The need to see that our lack of fear is because of our faith in a loving Lord who is bringing us through and is even helping us to be spiritually productive through this crisis.

Christian – this world needs for you to replace your fears with faith. Your family needs you to be strong and very courageous, and faithful, in these very unsettling times.