

Preparing For A New Beginning

Sermon 1 – It's *Not* About Us! Joshua 1:1-9

Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church, February 19, 2006

In just a few weeks you and I are going to experience what many of us have prayed for, longed for, and worked toward for a long time. Without question our entrance into our first building of worship and ministry is going to be an exciting time. But I must also confess that I am a little frightened by the prospect. I'm wondering, are we really ready for it? Are we ready for the changes and opportunities that will come? At this point I am just not sure.

For this reason, for the next few weeks I want us to give some attention to our preparation for this new beginning. As I have given this some thought and prayer I've concluded that the book of Joshua would be a good one for us to spend some time in. We are not going to study the whole book, only some of the key moments of change that they faced that we might know how to prepare ourselves for the changes that are before us.

Read Joshua 1:1-9...

The message that I am struck with, and convinced we need, is this: It's not about us! The building, the work that has gone into it, the dreams, the plans, and our success in the days, months, and years ahead are not about us. We need to know that. This was the message that God had for Joshua and the people of Israel as they prepared to cross the Jordan into the land of promise.

Reading these verses, it is obvious that Joshua was a bit fearful, and from our perspective it was perfectly understandable. We will give this further attention a little later but for now I want you to notice that God was ready. He provided Joshua with three encouragements that apply very well to our own lives and circumstances. See verses 6, 7, and 9...

As Joshua experienced a sense of hesitation and fear standing at the edge of a brand new beginning God wanted him to be strong and brave. Now, if you are anything like me you're wondering how that was possible. When I am weak there is nothing I can do to make myself strong, and when I am fearful there is nothing I can do to make myself brave.

That's what the three encouragements of God to Joshua were all about.

I. It's Not About Who We Are, It's About Who He Is!

Encouragement # 1 – It's not about who we are, it's about who He (God) is!

The very first thing that God said to Joshua was, “*Moses is dead, get up and go.*” In other words, this was not about Moses and it was not about Joshua, it was about God.

I have just finished reading the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. From those books I can see how Joshua and the people of Israel could have thought it was about Moses. Throughout their years of wandering Moses was at the forefront of all that they experienced. Even with Joshua, a man who stood out among the people as a faithful servant of God, every experience he had with God was in the footsteps of Moses. When Moses would speak with God as a friend speaks with a friend, Joshua would be in the background soaking it in.

Moses must have been a giant of a man in Joshua's eyes. But now Moses was dead and Joshua was standing in his place, and perhaps thinking, “*Everything Moses was, I am not. Who am I to be in such a position?*”

We have a tendency to do that, to hold certain people up as the answer to everything, and then we compare ourselves to them and conclude that we are the answer to nothing.

But did you notice here, it was not about Moses, it was not about Joshua, and it is not about you and me either. It was about God. See verse 5...

All along through their years of wandering it wasn't Moses, it was God who brought them where they were, and it was God, not Joshua, that would take them the rest of the way.

You and I are here today because of what God has done. To Him alone belongs the glory! And He will take us the rest of the way. If only we would remember it's not about who we are or who we are not, it's about who God is, then the new experiences ahead will be much easier and much more enjoyable.

II. It's Not About How We Feel, But What He Says.

Encouragement # 2 – It's not about how we feel, but what God says. Look again at verses 7-8...

As I've already pointed out, Joshua was afraid and I believe he had good reason to be so:

- (1) Moses, his lifelong mentor was dead. Everything that he knew, did, and experienced had come through Moses. And now he stood in the place of Moses. I would feel fearful too, wouldn't you?
- (2) Not only that, he had all those people of Israel to lead. They were a big part of why Moses was dead. The murmuring, complaining, and rebelling of the people of Israel never ended. Joshua knew what they were like and wasn't sure if he was up to the task.
- (3) Joshua also knew what was on the other side of the Jordan. There were some battles to be fought there. And although he of all the people knew that God could give them the victory, it was still a huge task and he felt overwhelmed by it.

Any of us standing in the place of Joshua would have felt the same as he did. I feel it now. What lies ahead of us is exciting, but it is also a little frightening. There will be some challenges and there will be some struggles. However, as God said to Joshua, He says to us, it's not about how we feel, it's about what He says.

As we move ahead, the Word of God must ever be before us. Too much in the name of Christianity today is being done based on how people feel, not on what God says. It must not be that way with us!

That's why we have the vision statement we do. We want to be a church that preaches and practices the timeless Word of God without compromise but with compassion ready and willing to reproduce ourselves.

If we are going to do this, build a place of worship and minister in God's name, it has to be by the Book of God, or else there's just no point in doing so.

Did you notice how clearly God made this same point with Joshua. They were to observe and meditate upon the Law. The Law was the first five books of the Bible. That's all they had at that time. We now have 66 books, which make up the Bible. What God said to Joshua is equally true for us.

First, we need to observe/obey the Word of God and not turn from it to the left or to the right. That's when we get into trouble. Later in the book of Joshua we will find him making that mistake and it will be very costly. Our lives never get messed up for doing what God says, it happens because we decide to take a walk to the side. It's strange the way we think. If God says do something we feel afraid, but if He says not to do something we feel no fear and plunge ahead regardless of the consequences. It must never be about how we feel; it must always be about what God says.

Second, We are to meditate on the word of God. That means think about what it says and how it applies to our life. Do you spend time in the Word of God everyday thinking about how it applies to your life, your decisions, and your family? Surprisingly, the vast majority of Christians in America do not. Their only time in the Word is what they get whenever they attend church services and that is just not enough. As important as our time together is, your time alone with God and His Word is far more important both for you and our church family. That's where God blesses us and prepares us to be a blessing to His people.

Notice, when we stay the course and meditate upon the word of God He causes us to prosper. That does not mean that we will make a million dollars. It means He is going to bless our way. That is because instead of making decisions based on how we feel, we are going to make them based on what He says. That approach to living will reap His success. Let's do our best not to forget that in the days ahead. It will make our journey so much easier.

III. It's Not About What We Want, But What He Gives.

Encouragement # 3 – It's not about what we want, but about what He gives!

This is a tough one for us. Trying to sort through what we need, what we want, and what God is ready to give is difficult. We don't have the eyes, mind, or heart for it. We get confused easily.

Because of what God says to Joshua, it seems that he must have been thinking, *“I don’t want this, it would be easier just to stay on this side of the Jordan.”* If you look at verses 10f that is exactly what some of the people of Israel decided. May I say to you that they settled for too little?

God has so much more to give than what we want. Did you notice how much He was ready to give them? See verse 3...

If I was them, I would have been walking my shoes off! When I first moved here I tried as best I could to follow this verse. I walked through all the streets of town asking God to give me the town and provide me with opportunities to see people saved.

Have you thought about this at all? What you want for yourself and what you want for Gretna Baptist Church? Was a building all you wanted? Was a few more people all you wanted? God has so much more to give. But we will never know it; we’ll never possess it as long as we’re focused on what we want. What we want is too small.

As you read on in the Old Testament about the history of Israel you find that they never received all God was ready to give them because as soon as their wants were satisfied they stopped looking to God for more. That has continued to be a shortcoming of God’s people. Let’s not settle for that!

What is it that you want? Cast it aside! Remember, it’s not about what we want; it’s about what God is ready to give.

As Joshua and the people of Israel were preparing for their new beginning that was the message God had for them, and I believe it’s the message we need too!

As we approach the future:

It’s not about who we are; it’s about who He is!
It’s not about how we feel; it’s about what He says!
It’s not about what we want; it’s about what He gives!

It’s not about us; it’s about Him! If we keep that in mind the days ahead truly will be exciting ones!