

Title: The battle continues, but...
Text: Joshua
Theme: Not done fighting, yet
Series: Introduction to Judges
Prop Stmt: Fighting and suffering for something that matters is infinitely better than living for something that doesn't.

Read Text: Judges 1.1; Joshua 1.1-5

If you joined our church in the last five years you might not know that we had a beloved youth pastor who had a profound impact upon us, who was diagnosed with ALS and died at a relatively young age. Our life as a congregation was impacted by this. I thought of this when I read the opening words of Judges. "*After the death of Joshua.*" So, this morning, we are going to do an overview of the book of Joshua because next Sunday, we are starting a series through the book of Judges. But, in order to understand Judges we need to understand Joshua. Details? Sure, but there are encouragements and warnings in Joshua that are needed for our souls. So I am going to cover 5 things: 1) An overview 2) The main message and emphasis 3) Takeaways 4) How Joshua sets up Judges 5) How Joshua points to Christ.

I. Overview of the book.

The book of Joshua is about Joshua and his leadership of Israel and the conquest of the land of Canaan around 1400 B.C. We are first introduced to Joshua in Exodus 17 when he, under authority of Moses, leads Israel to victory in her first battle as a nation. Joshua is from the tribe of Ephraim and he and a guy named Caleb are the only two spies (out of twelve) who after spying out the land of Canaan come back with a positive report that reflects faith in God.

At the beginning of this book, Israel is a people group, but she does not yet look like a nation because she does not have any land. Israel has come out of Egypt. She started in Egypt as a small clan or tribe and grew to be major people group. And while the book of Exodus showcases God as redeemer, who sets his people free, Joshua is about God as warrior who fights for his people. At the beginning of the book, Israel has a leader and no land, while at the end of the book; she has the land, but no single leader. That is hugely important as we will see. The book has 24 chapters and most of the action is in the first half. The second half is a lot of detail that we are prone to skim over. But it is the detail of the 2nd half that sets the stage for Judges. So, the book has action (1st half) and administration (2nd half).

The book begins with the death of Moses and ends with the death of Joshua. In the beginning of Joshua you have this sense of, "*What are we going to do, Moses, our leader is dead.*" At the beginning of Judges you have this sense of "*What are we going to do, Joshua our leader is dead.*" So, the book is aptly named Joshua because Joshua was the leader during the initial time that Israel entered into the land of Canaan and accomplished a good bit of the conquest.

Again, the book only has 24 chapters. This is the shortest book yet in the Old Testament. And yet it takes 5 chapters just for Israel to actually get into the land. Now, keep in mind that under the leadership of Moses, Israel won a major military victory in the defeat of Sihon and the Amorites and Og, the king of Bashan. This gave Israel a large piece of property on the east side of Jordan which enabled them to have a secure home base from which to launch their invasion. Not only was that very troubling to the nation-states in Canaan, but of course word of the devastation of Egypt 40 years before is still well known. Think about this. Egypt was the super power of its day. The Israelites and other peoples Egypt had conquered powered Egypt's wealth. Egypt probably only had a population of 3-5 million. Israel was probably 2 million. 2 million slaves can create a lot of wealth for 3-5 million people. That money can build strong armies and Egypt was wealthy, powerful and hungry for kingdom expansion. Then, all of a sudden, she drops off the history charts. There is no record of another kingdom that takes over and rules the world then. She is not invaded and conquered by someone else. We know what happened. The plagues wiped her out agriculturally. The Red Sea destroyed her militarily and the exodus eliminated all of her labor force which destroyed her economically. This was a major shock to Egypt, many of whom only had to worry about what gym, Starbucks and nail salon to go to because the slaves did everything, but now had to plant corn and raise cattle if they wanted to eat. My point is, if you lived in Canaan and Egypt was your fire-breathing neighbor who went from being the world's super-power to a 3rd world nation all by these Israelite slaves, you most certainly would have grave concerns about them.

Rahab lived in Jericho and said so. She told the spies from Israel that we heard about what happened in Egypt. We heard about the Red Sea. All of that is serious stuff. Can you imagine what is going through the minds of these kings and nations of Canaan, when they find out that the Jordan River stopped flowing, that the river bank became dry, that the nation of Israel marched over and then it started flowing again? Anyway, just getting into the land takes five chapters.

The actual battles and conquest cover chapters 6-12. That's seven chapters. Seven chapters describe the actual conquest of the land. But, three of those seven chapters (6-8) deal with the conquest of just two cities, Jericho and Ai. Chapters 9-12 cover the conquest of the rest of the nation beginning with the southern campaign and then the northern one. After a recap in chapter 12, chapter 13 lists the territories that still need to be conquered and then begins a detailed listing of how the land is going to be divided up. Now, this may not sound like a big deal to you but, this is like the reading of the will after the funeral is over. This is when your family and tribe finds out, what land you will actually receive. That was not only a big deal, but here we are 3,000 years later, and that land is still a big deal! It is always going to be a big deal because Jesus is a big deal and he is going to establish the capital city of his kingdom in Jerusalem. Of course that is going to be controversial. So, after the allotments of land, the designations of the cities of refuge, the allotment of pasture lands for the Levites, the narrow avoidance of a major civil war over a misunderstanding, we come to the end of the book which is the final charge of Joshua, the renewal of the covenant and Joshua's death. That's the overview.

II. Main points and emphasis.

A. Leadership – Joshua's leadership is established

Joshua and Caleb were two of the spies who spied out the land of Canaan shortly after Israel had walked out free from Egypt. The rest of the spies were terrified at the size of the people and the strength of their fortifications. The fortifications were formidable. But, Joshua and Caleb were not intimidated. They were ready years ago to go in and take the land 40 years ago. Now Joshua is in charge, the nation is finally ready and he is an excellent leader. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and later on David were all leaders who did some things that we grimace at. But not Joshua, really. This entire book is a study of his remarkable leadership. He is faithful, obedient and determined all the way to the very end. He never exploits his position for himself and at the end when he could leverage his influence for his own, he gives it away. One might fault him not being more careful about the Gibeonite deception, but even then, he showed that he was a man of his word. Even a careful look at the initial disaster of Ai ends up enhancing Joshua's leadership as he takes initiative to find out the problem, addresses it with the entire nation, receives God's directions on Ai and then leads in carrying out a successful battle. If you want to do a study of leadership, Joshua would make an excellent case study on so many levels. At the end of the book, Joshua, who was from the tribe of Ephraim is very fair and equitable in handing out the land to all of the tribes. There are no complaints recorded of him playing favorites and there are no rebellions – amazing! Also, Joshua does not try to create a monarchy and find a job for his son, (if he had one). Actually, there is no record of him being married, though he may have been.

Following the allotment of land, Joshua gathers the people one last time and gives them his final charge, renews the covenant with them and then sends them to enjoy their inheritance and to finish the job. In fact, you will not enjoy what God has provided you, if you do not finish the job.

B. Conquest and Covenant

Another theme obviously is conquest. The nation is given a mission to take the land that God has chosen for them. But even though the land is a gift, they have to take possession of it in accordance with the terms that God has set forth (Covenant). This is conquest by faith that is displayed in obedience. The conquest has to take place in accordance with God's covenant. When the nation crossed over the Jordan, God would not let them begin the conquest until they had obeyed his command regarding circumcision. Circumcision was the mark of their separation unto God. They were not their own nation free to do whatever they wanted to do. They were in relationship with Yahweh and this relationship functioned on the basis of this covenant. The command by God for all of the males to be circumcised had been ignored during the 40 years in the wilderness and now, God tells Joshua, that you aren't going anywhere until this takes place. Now, this is obviously a delicate issue to bring up in a sermon and I've often wondered if God couldn't have found an easier way to mark the nation of Israel. You know, perhaps like a nose ring, or ear piercing. But, when you think about it, God gets really personal with his people. He

gives a very clear message by this Old Testament command. And that is this: You are mine. Every part of you belongs to me. What people see and what people don't see, your public life and your private life is all mine. This event was so important, because it marked a renewal of the covenant of God and they renamed the location as Gilgal (Hebrew: to roll) because the reproach that they brought with them from Egypt, was now finally removed. The whole thing pointed to salvation and to Christ. Therefore, it makes sense that following this they celebrated the Passover for the first time in their own land. Which brings us to another theme:

C. Remembering

Three times (chapters 5, 8 and 24) the covenant is renewed. Seven times the nation sets up stone memorials in the land to remind the generations to come of all that God had done for them. Three of those seven stone memorials were set up when the covenant was renewed those three times. This means that Israel never really forgot all that God had done for her; she chose not to pay any attention to it. Those memorials were evidences of God's hand on them and over them as well as in the case of Achan's monument, the consequences of rebellion.

III. Takeaways (the sermons that are preached over and over in Judges)

A. God always keeps his promises.

God told Abraham that this land was for his people and that they would have it. He told Moses the same thing and finally they get it. It may take longer than we initially think, but God always keeps his promises. And because he always keeps his promises, God can be trusted. That means that his word can be trusted. Since his word can be trusted, we are called to believe it. So, when the Bible says that the people marched around the city of Jericho for seven days and that on the seventh day they blew trumpets and the walls fell down flat, I believe that and preach that. That is not myth and legend. Of course, that account has been savagely ridiculed through the years as you can imagine.

But Jericho along with Lachish and Hazor – and Jerusalem of course have been the sites of generations of archaeological digs. And a few years ago now, the New York Times reported that well, it looks as if the Bible's account of the fall of Jericho may have some validity to it after all. All we can do is say, welcome to the party. It was never in doubt. But, of course the world doesn't really care if the walls fell down or not. The issue is, are you going to acknowledge that God is and that He has spoken and that we are under his authority and his Word? That is the issue. For us, the issue is settled and the story of Joshua is the story again of how God keeps his Word. This message is lost in Judges.

B. You cannot fight the enemies out there without first fighting your own issues because your sin affects others.

After Israel's victory at Jericho, the nation was flying high. Their confidence was huge. God had done an incredible thing and if this was how things were going to be, well then,

let's go and get this taken care of. But the very next battle was a disaster and Israel suffered an embarrassing defeat. A man named Achan secretly took some things in the aftermath of the battle of Jericho that God had banned because Achan decided that God's law did not apply to him. He could sin and get away with it. The robe from Babylon was too tempting and the wedge of gold was too easy. 36 wives and/or mothers lost husbands and sons that day because of Achan. There were 36 funerals because one man thought that God wasn't serious about his Word. As a child I would read this story and be so angry at Achan. As a man, I've had to realize how many times I've been Achan.

C. If God is for us, who can be against us?

One of the sub-themes of Joshua is, "be strong and courageous." It is a charge that is first given to Joshua but then to the people. But, we are called to be strong and courageous, not because we are strong, but because God is and he is worthy of our trust.

We do not need to fear if God is with us. Joshua has an encounter with God. The captain of the armies of the Lord (Christ) appears to Joshua and Joshua is so overwhelmed that he falls to the ground (end of chapter 5). Then he asks a very important question: Whose side are you on? Are you on our side, or their side? This Captain answers by saying, I didn't come to take sides; I came to take over. "I am the Captain of the armies of the Lord, and I have come." Wow!

What makes you afraid? I am not asking about the circumstances, like being in the basement alone, in the dark, or hearing sounds in the night, or having to get up and speak in front of a bunch of people. Think deeper. What is common to all of those fears? We are afraid when we are confronted with something that we do not think that we can control.

Therefore, we need to be terrified if God isn't for us. God was against the Canaanites. Why? Was it because they were Canaanites? No! It was because they were in rebellion to God and refused to humble themselves. Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute and she and her family was saved in chapter 6 while Achan the Israelite and his family were executed in chapter 7. Therefore, another takeaway would be:

D. God plays for keeps. (or if God is against us, who can be for us) – The flood (worldwide), Canaan (area wide),

God is giving this land to his people by using them as an instrument of his judgment against the wicked nations that had lived there. God is serious about sin and is serious about judging sin. The Canaanites were notorious for their immorality and fertility cults. The evidence of this was all over the place and as such, it would be very, very tempting for the nation to not only investigate, but to experiment with this. So, God does two things: He tells his people the reason why these other nations are being displaced and in some cases, utterly destroyed. And initially he says, "don't touch anything or take anything." It doesn't matter if it is a costly robe from Babylon or a wedge of gold. It is more important to be pure than it is to be rich. The favor of God is not found in having

things it is being right before God. How could Achan be so tragically and grievously stupid? He had seen so much, heard so much, experienced so much of God. But it is like us. Growing up with the gospel and being surrounded by it can be an enormous blessing, if you really believe it. Growing up with the gospel can be terrible if you think that somehow because you know (intellectually) the gospel (and others don't), that this makes you better or privileged. If the gospel does not humble you, then you really do not understand the gospel. If you are not humble, if you are not afraid of trusting in yourself, if you are not teachable, if you do not have the spirit of a servant, if you are not gripped in your soul by the warnings of the Scripture, then, you do not look like a follower of Jesus and probably aren't. Wake up and smell the coffee. God plays for keeps. This is no game and it never has been. That means that...

E. The faithfulness of one generation does not guarantee the faithfulness of the next.

In chapter 24, there are a series of warnings about following false gods. Joshua had no illusions that everything was fine. He knew, it seemed, that the battle, in that sense is never over. Every generation has to believe God. Just because your parents believe, does not give you a pass. People may cut you some slack at work or school because they respect your parents, but you cannot ride their coattails with God. And this issue, in many ways sets up Judges.

IV. How Joshua sets-up Judges. (those 5 things from #3)

Historically you can understand how the nation of Israel is now a collection of tribes without one central leader or capital. You can see how keeping the land in the family and in the tribe meant that you stayed among your own and married among your own. This lack of involvement and accountability led people into thinking that they were not responsible or accountable to the rest of the nation. Tribal rivalries arise. The fact that idolatry was never fully eradicated bears fruit. We are tempted to bang our heads against the wall in Judges when we think, "Can't you see all that God has done for you and yet you go out and worship other gods?! Are you crazy?" The truth is, even during Joshua's day, idolatry was still an issue. It would always be an issue. That battle would never be over.

V. How Joshua points to Christ.

A. His name.

Joshua is the Hebrew name, Yeshua which means Yahweh is salvation. Yeshua in Aramaic is Jesus. The name Jesus is the same name Joshua. Jesus means Yeshua is salvation. So, when the angel Gabriel told Joseph, that you will call his name Jesus, he gives to Joseph the reason for choosing that name. Like Joshua who was the human agent that brought salvation and help to Israel in conquering the land, Jesus is the agent who brings salvation and help from sin. Joshua points to Christ.

B. He took God at his Word and never wavered, even against all odds.

God gave to Joshua a very unusual battle plan for Jericho. It was military folly. Who would have thought that this would work? Who would have thought that a King, dying on a cross as condemned criminal, rejected by his own people would work for our ultimate victory? But Jesus took his Father's Word and never wavered and by living the life we could not live, Jesus then died the death we could not die and what looked to be certain defeat was revealed to be ultimate victory. For the death that Jesus died was the perfect and complete payment for the sins of every single person who would ever believe in him and his resurrection from the dead was the statement from the Father that the check had cleared the bank. The payment was made and accepted in full.

C. He used the success of his victory to share the spoils with others.

I cannot over emphasize this. At the end of his life Joseph hands out the land, gives a final charge and then fades away and goes to his own home before he dies. This is very similar to what George Washington did for our country. He rescued this nation and could have been king. He had the loyalty of the nation, but instead he walked away. Even after reluctantly being president, he walked away and in so doing he shared his authority with others. Well, Christ is not going to walk away because he is truly the king, but he uses his ultimate victory and all that he gained in order to share it with us.

D. He completed his mission.

His life was marked by struggle, but he never quit. He did what he was called to do. So did Christ. He completed his mission on this earth and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. For us, we are not done. We are not finished. We still battle, although the war has been won. We battle with confidence knowing that our struggle will be successful. The message of Joshua is, don't quit. There will be a time to rest, that time is not now. In this life, we struggle and in our struggle, we lean upon Christ.

In May of 1945, Winston Churchill, prime minister of England enjoyed an approval rating of 83%. He came to office in 1940 at perhaps the darkest hour of England's history and led them to victory over Hitler and the Axis powers in W.W.II. It is difficult to imagine how anyone else could have done what he did. He was the leader of the Conservative Party. He was now a beloved hero and in the elections of 1945, his party was decimated by the Labor Party in a landslide and the Labor party ended up with an enormous advantage in the House of Commons. How do you explain that? There are a number of factors actually, but one of them was the fact that the people of England were weary of war. They were weary of war while Churchill saw the threat of Stalin and communism. But, as long as it was over there in Eastern Europe – who cares? Right?

We know it in our own land. Politicians criticize war and promise to bring all of the troops home, only to discover that there are some really evil people in the world who want to destroy us and our friends and if we bring all of our troops home in order to save

a few dollars we will be breaking our promises to our friends and essentially giving them over. War is a terrible fact of life.

This book begins with excitement and ends with a weary reality check. The generation that fought the battles knew the price of conquest because they paid it. Instead of entering undiscovered and uninhabited lands they came into a land that was already possessed and claimed. Their job was to dispossess those who were there. Fighting people on their home turf is extremely hard. They knew what it cost to be able to inhabit the land. The elders who outlived Joshua had the same blood running in their veins. It was a long battle.

I want to read to you what one elder recently said, “*I have wanted to leave this church many times . . . all the talk about battling sin and serving others; people keeping me accountable – people who are sinful themselves, but I realize this is exactly the point because I’m still sinful, and I want to be done with sin.* (It sounds like a war-weary soldier doesn’t it? I am weary with the war. I’ve done my deployment. I want to go home. I don’t want to think about fighting anymore. I want to sit, watch a football game, go fishing, and go golfing. I want to sleep in, or cut my grass or play with my kids. I’m done with war.) The elder goes on, [But] “*I need the accountability, the modeling, the care, the love, the attention. My flesh hates it all! But apart from all this, I probably would have divorced my wife, and then a second, and then a third, and never lived with my children. God shows his grace and care for me through his church.*”

Be strong and courageous because of what God has already done and is going to do.