

Receiving Your Inheritance

Messages from the Book of Joshua

Message 3

Military Preparation

Joshua 2:1-24

Introduction

Israel is going home. After 430 years in Egypt, and about 600 years after God's promise to give Abraham a wonderful new home – after 40 years wandering aimlessly in the desert, Abraham's descendants are about to enter the land God promised to give them. But they will not be able simply to walk in and take up residence. The Canaanites live there, and they will have to be expelled first. Taking possession of the lands will be a long and difficult process, but God has promised them success. What's more significant, God promised His own presence. God said, "as I was with Moses, *so* I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you." (1:5b) A great war is ahead, but it is not primarily Israel's war – it is God's war, and He will be out in front doing the hard fighting. God promised the Israelites success in this endeavor, and He will be there personally to insure it.

But last week we saw that success is contingent upon a fundamental quality. God expects godly character of His people, and He particularly singles out courage. "Be strong and courageous" is His constant drumbeat, lest the people loose heart like their parents who refused to trust God to fight for them. More than weapons, more than training, more than military knowledge, skill, and experience – godly courage will determine the outcome of the war for Canaan. God expects you to be courageous, too. In your friendships, in your classes, in your job, in your families – you can, and *must*, trust God to stand before you as you stand up to oppose evil and promote righteousness. Last week we saw that courage comes from steady meditation on scripture, and is available to all ordinary Christians who seek to follow God.

Joshua believed God. We know this because soon after God spoke to Him about these things, Joshua commanded the people to prepare to enter Canaan. But before the whole company crossed the Jordan river, Joshua sent two spies to check out the land. In this chapter people typically focus on Rahab's behavior with regard to the spies, particularly her lie to protect them. This appears to be an ethical problem, and indeed it deserves our attention. But before we get to that issue, there are other questions to consider. For example, why sent out any spies at all?

The Spies

We have been calling attention to Joshua's experience serving under Moses, and how God specifically promised to be with him, as He was with Moses. And Moses sent out spies. So is Joshua repeating what he saw his mentor do? But wasn't sending the spies into Canaan a colossal mistake? Everything was going fine for Moses until the spies came back and reported that Canaan was defended by giants. Everything fell apart then. The people lost heart, God refused to go with them, and they were condemned to the wilderness for 40 years. Perhaps it would have been better if Moses had just skipped the spies and marched right into the land. But the spies were not Moses' idea. *God* commanded Moses to send the spies to investigate the land. It was necessary to have a sober assessment of the task facing them before several million people, including women, children, and livestock, attempted to displace the present inhabitants of the land. To get right to the point, it would have been stupid, and an invitation to catastrophe to attempt an invasion without knowing anything about the target. Military intelligence is essential to a military operation. God knows this. That is why God ordered the spying trip.

The problem in Moses' day was not the spying, but the spies. Turn to Numbers 13 and let's look at

the information the spies gathered from their visit. In verses 27 and 28 we read, “We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this *is* its fruit. Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land *are* strong; the cities *are* fortified *and* very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there.” This report reveals two very significant aspects of the spying operation. First, the spies were very impressed by the fruit of the land. In verse 27 they said, “this is its fruit.” If you back up to verse 23 you can see how captivated they were with the fruit of the land. The text goes to some length to recount how the spies harvested grapes, pomegranates, and figs – and the cluster of grapes was so big it took two men to carry it! Well so far, so good. Moses instructed them to check out the produce they found. But what about their investigation of the inhabitants? All that is said is, “we saw the descendants of Anak there.” Apparently they did not mingle with the inhabitants at all. In contrast to the spies Joshua sent out, who entered the city and conversed with the people, it appears the first group of spies looked from afar. Moving down to the middle of verse 32 we read, “The land through which we have gone as spies *is* a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it *are* men of *great* stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.” Now I don’t want to make too much out of this, but again, notice the verbs. You see that they all have to do with seeing? The general drift of this passage is that the spies were afraid to actually talk to the inhabitants.

All this fits with the rest of the story of the people who escaped from Egypt. Over and over they complained, and their complaints fit a definite pattern. They complained about their food, and they complained about their adversaries. Here was a whole nation who had been suffering for decades in slavery. They saw God rescue them by fabulous miracles, and on their way out, God gave them plenty of provisions and completely destroyed the Egyptian army. But they did not learn. They never learned. All their lives they feared their enemies and lusted after food. Time after time God punished them for their miserable attitude, but they never changed. I think the spies simply saw what they wanted to see. They wanted food and they feared enemies, so they saw food and enemies. The problem was not the plan, but the men sent to execute the plan. The plan to spy was good – it came directly from God. But the men who carried it out did not trust God, so the whole operation failed.

So to return to our question, was Joshua simply imitating Moses when he decided to send spies into Canaan? Well, yes. But more than that, he was obeying God. How is that? In Numbers we read where God specifically told Moses to send out spies. This text does not say that God told Joshua to send spies. But here we can learn an important principle of God’s character and man’s obedience. And that is that God expects man to learn. God does not expect man to remain ignorant all his life, but to become mature. God did not speak to Joshua and tell him to send out spies, for Joshua already knew to do this. Joshua was attentive to God. He meditated on God’s Word. He remembered God’s acts. He learned how to please God. He learned that the first step in entering Canaan is to send spies. He did not need God to speak on this again.

There is a tendency in some parts of the church to think that everything we do ought to be immediately directed by God. We ought to pray about our questions and problems, and God will nudge us in the right direction. And this is right, as far as it goes. But once God teaches you His mind on a matter, you ought to remember, and obey. In short, you are supposed to grow up. When you were a child, your parents showed you how to tie your shoes. That was a good thing. But I hope by now you have learned how to do this and no longer need your Mom or Dad to help you. Are you becoming a grown up Christian? Have you learned God’s ways? I am not in any way suggesting you should pray less, but your prayers change their character – just as your conversation with your parents is different now than when you were a toddler. Too many Christians think it is deeply spiritual to request and receive direct guidance from God, when in fact it is a sign of spiritual immaturity. The mature Christian knows his God, and lives accordingly. Can you say you know your God deeply? God is not all that hard to know. He reveals Himself clearly in the scripture which

He has given us. As you immerse yourself daily in His Word, you will more and more think and act like Him – just like Joshua.

The Harlot

This story of the spies is one that customarily shows up in Bible story books and Sunday School lessons. It is an intriguing story, one worthy of a movie. But I don't know of any story book or Sunday School lesson which explains the spies choice of lodging. In fact, I don't recall any story or lesson which explains what a harlot is. In case that is an unfamiliar word to you, it is synonymous with whore, and prostitute – a woman who rents her body to men for their pleasure. In the nature of the case prostitution involves fornication – sexual immorality, which is explicitly forbidden by God. It's right there in the Ten Commandments. Engaging in prostitution, and using a prostitute are sins. So here we have these spies, sent by God – as soon as they enter Jericho they find a prostitute and shack up with her. But what is jarring about this scene is that there seems to be no condemnation for their act. What are we to conclude? Did God grant them a special dispensation because they were on His business? Does the end justify the means? It is actually OK to fornicate if you are a spy? James Bond seems to think so. In short, did they sin or not? If so, why is there no condemnation of their act? If not, how can we justify their behavior?

There are several things to keep in mind as we unravel this question. First is that this protagonist in this passage is Rahab, not the spies. We come with all sorts of questions regarding the details of the story, but God is concerned to focus our attention on the message He wishes to communicate. Consequently, the morality of the spies is not of critical significance. Perhaps they sinned and suffered the consequences for it, but those are not recorded here because they are not immediately relevant to the story. Or perhaps they simply hid out in a safe place. The principle here is that God tells us what He wants us to know, not all we wish to know. Ultimately, we do not know what the spies did with Rahab, and we don't need to know.

But consider also the alternatives. Here were two foreigners in a strange city. We can see from what Rahab says that the inhabitants of Jericho know the Israelites are in the neighborhood. And when the king learned they entered the city, he sought to capture them. So what did you expect them to do? Book a room at the Hilton? There were no big hotels in the ancient world, and a Hebrew would have stood out in a small inn. The spies needed to gather information from the people of Jericho without getting caught. They could hardly interview the town council! Perhaps it was a shrewd move to visit someone the reputable people would not think to check.

I personally think the spies conducted themselves honorably. The Bible never hides the sin of God's people, and sometimes points it out even in passing. If they had sinned, I think it would have been mentioned. But some people will think that I am whitewashing the record, that I am afraid to face the obvious implications of this story. So be it. As I said before, this is not the focal point of the passage.

The Lie

Now we come to the interesting question of the lie. Rahab lied to protect the spies. The ninth commandment plainly forbids lying. But it was the lie which saved the spies. Was it right to lie in this case?

This is undoubtedly a challenging question, and people have wrestled with it for thousands of years. On the face of it, we can't bring ourselves to say it is right to break the ninth commandment – to sin, in other words. But neither can we comfortably say Rahab should have handed over the spies to certain death. It seems we are torn between unthinking orthodoxy and situational ethics. For if it is right to sin in certain circumstances – or if it is not sin to break the law in certain circumstances – who decides what those circumstances are? Is it right to lie to save life? To convict a criminal? To preserve someone's honor? To get your degree so that you can get a job to serve people? The problem is, when you allow breaking the law

for a good cause, good causes spring up everywhere. Yet, righteous people in all cultures have violated the norms to promote good, and they are lauded.

Some people are so persuaded of the importance of trying your best to serve people, they are willing to run the risk of lawbreaking. These people will permit lying to save life, or to encourage someone, or to advance a good cause. They cite the example of Corrie ten Boom who illegally hid Jews from the Germans during the second World War. They hope that there will be enough sound judgment to prevent total anarchy. Others are so convinced of the necessity of maintaining law and order, they are willing to allow suffering. These suggest that God might have miraculously rescued the spies if Rahab had told the truth, or that He would have overcome their death by some other means. But I think both these attempts to deal with this passage miss the mark. The problem with these positions is that they inadequately consider the specific circumstances.

The root issue here is not telling the truth, or saving lives. The root issue here is the war. The big question which motivates everything else is, “Which side are you on?” Now this is not an academic question. There are very serious consequences to this question, for the wrong choice would likely get you killed. The Israelites had no intention of taking prisoners alive, and the inhabitants of Jericho would kill the Israelites to save their city. One side will loose and perish. The question is not *whether* to save life, but *which* life to save.

Rahab had a profound choice. She could seek to save the lives of her countrymen, or she could seek to save the lives of the spies. Most of the citizens of Jericho would have handed over the spies. They would have done all they could to aid their land. It’s a natural response to defend your home, and this would have been the understandable response of the city-dwellers. It’s either them or us. Let’s kill the spies and save ourselves. But Rahab took the other choice. She saved the spies and was willing to condemn her city to destruction. Why? What would cause you to turn against your own country? Did Rahab come to the conclusion that Jericho was so wicked it deserved to be destroyed? The text doesn’t say. What it does say is that Rahab knew Jericho would loose the war, and knowing that, she sided with the victor.

Now this seems real disappointing. We expect something better from the heroine of the story. We expect her to give a courageous speech about her love for the true God and her desire to serve Him. We expect something spiritual. Perhaps she might have made an offering on the occasion, or sung a psalm. But no, she merely sought to save her hide. There is no sign that she loves God or wants to be part of Israel. We are left with a very bad taste in our mouths by the sheer utilitarian nature of her motives. It seems like an ungodly, pragmatic deal cut between two sinners, the spies and the harlot.

But did you notice exactly what she said? “I know that the LORD has given you the land.” How did she know that? She went on to cite God’s great acts of deliverance from the Egyptians and the Amorites on the east bank of the Jordan. But all Jericho knew about those acts, including the king – and it seems they were not convinced God would give the land to the Israelites. Or if they were, they were unwilling to accept God’s plan. Rahab was different from all the other inhabitants of Jericho. Everyone there knew what God had done and planned to do. But she alone believed it would happen and accepted it. Only Rahab was willing to let God have Jericho. In other words, Rahab had faith. Rahab heard God’s Word and believed it. Others doubted or rebelled, but because Rahab had faith she knew that the Lord had given the Israelites the land.

Now do you see what was happening on that rooftop? Rahab converted to the true God. She switched sides. She abandoned Jericho and allied herself with Israel. Sure, there were some pragmatic motives involved, but what’s new about that? Don’t we all come to God in part as a self-protective measure?

Sure we do. That afternoon Rahab left Jericho and became a spy for God.

Now what about that lie? Well, who ever said you had to tell the truth in war? Certainly not God. Later He trained the Israelites in the skillful use of deception to defeat their enemies. This is not a case of saving life, or maintaining the law, or doing good to others. This is a case of destroying the established civil order by war and erecting an entirely new culture in it's place. War is best conducted with honor, but that does not require telling your enemies what they want to know.

God's Mercy

The most amazing part of this story is God's mercy in the midst of imminent destruction. God used the Israelites to totally annihilate Jericho because it was a sinful, perverted city. But on the eve of its destruction, He reached out and touched the heart of an ordinary woman. Rahab believed God, but her neighbors did not. Why? Why do you believe God? Why does anyone believe God? What did Rahab do to earn God's favor? Nothing. She was no different from all the other wicked inhabitants of Jericho, yet God saved her. And you, what do you think you did to earn God's favor? Nothing. You are no better than your friends and classmates who are going to burn in hell. Why did God save you? There is no answer. The scripture says that while you were His enemy, God saved you. Isn't this the most marvelous thing in the world? If this is true, can you do anything but serve this Savior with your whole life?

If you are not a Christian, if you have not given your life to serve God, if you have not believed God's Word, He commands you tonight to learn the lesson of Rahab. God is not looking for purity, or intelligence, or beauty. All He asks is that you believe Him. God declares that you deserve to die because you keep rebelling against Him. He promises to save you if you trust Christ and follow Him. If you will believe this, you can escape certain death, eternal death, eternity in hell. God's mercy is infinite and everlasting. He will welcome you now, as you are. Follow Rahab. Abandon your family and friends and save yourself tonight.

Yesterday I received a missionary newsletter with some information about Lian Tombing, a man in India our church supports. I want to read you a brief passage.

I spent today visiting regions on Manipur surveying for Evangelism and Church Planting. It's wonderful to know and tell you that I have a feeling that wherever we go the Lord is giving us those people so that they may know about Christ and be saved. It's risky, though, as the Manipuri's are quite resistant to the gospel, and all places are full of rebels and insurgents...I could feel and see that the Lord is with me and He is leading me!

Here is a modern-day Joshua. Here is a man saved by God who is giving his life to God. Lian is not merely surviving as a Christian, he is on the attack. Like Joshua, he is surveying the land of Manipur and plans to take it for God. Lian is after adventure and glory – not for himself, but for God. But such a life is dangerous and comes with major risks. He goes on to report a situation that developed in November.

I have a special prayer request. A week ago, I received a demand note from a rebel group in our region. It amounted to about \$1,500 At first I was shocked and did not know what to do except pray. The lord helped me and gave me the wisdom and courage to approach the leader of the rebel group with the help of one of my close friends who knew him. We visited the rebel leader in his own home a few nights ago, and I pleaded with him to cancel this demand and thus totally exempt me from his kind of extortion since I am a church leader and mission worker. He told me that I would have money since I recently returned from the USA and thus have connections with some churches in the States. I explained to him that as a student in the USA were not there to earn money but to

study. Since learned just enough to live on with my family, I do not have that much money to give away out of my pocket. He asked me if I can divert some money from the project, and I replied saying that all the money sent to us by PMI and churches in the USA are meant for projects like church planting and buildings and running a children's home. I cannot divert those funds or anything else, as it would involve lying to my supporters in the USA. This is against my conscience and my calling from the Lord. Do not tempt me to do corruption! I have been in the USA to study the scripture at the seminary, and if you want me to do something or contribute something towards you, just call me to preach and to give gospel crusades amongst the rebels. That's all I have and I am ready to do this at anytime. I have no money but God and the message of the gospel of Christ Jesus. Ask me what I have and do not ask me for what I do not have.

Isn't this an example of the courage we spoke of last week? Isn't this an inspiring story? You are not in a physically dangerous place like Manipur, but you have before you a whole campus, 6,000 students who are perishing. Do you have the courage to reach out to them? Do you have the gratitude to give them the salvation you have? May God use us at Lehigh like He used Joshua – to conquer the land, but in our case, with the gospel.

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