

thrive

NOV'26-JAN'27

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THIS ISSUE

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**JOSHUA, JUDGES,
RUTH, 1 SAMUEL**
— light in the darkness

In this issue of *Thrive* we will be following the amazing journey of the children of Israel, under the leadership of Joshua, into the promised land. The story of the conquest of the promised land holds many profound spiritual lessons for those who want to live a victorious life. The same is true of the story of Israel's apostasy during the period of the judges. What these stories highlight is the faithfulness of God despite human failure. This theme is highlighted as we turn to the book of Ruth and Samuel. Join us as we continue our journey through the Bible in the Old Testament books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth and Samuel.

MJ

The parts of the Bible that we find most disturbing may well offer the most to us. The things we find jarring can jolt us into a deeper understanding. The conquest of Canaan is perhaps the most infamously difficult event for modern believers to digest. It is, in fact, meant to sound shocking because it is an act of divine judgement designed to prefigure the final great judgement at the end of history. And judgement is the vital backdrop against which the biblical story of grace becomes meaningful. Canaan was given to Israel as a new Eden, prefiguring the final new heavenly earth (Revelation 21-22). Joshua is doing what his namesake ('Jesus' = 'Joshua' in Hebrew) will do (see Revelation 19) before ushering in a new heavenly earth (Revelation 21-22). This is not ethnic cleansing; it's divine judgement on a people whose sin had reached its full measure (note Genesis 15:16). The Canaanites are to be driven out (and destroyed if necessary) of the sacred space they had desecrated so terribly. And one day the sin of humanity will also reach its tipping point and then the final judgement will come. It is God's prerogative to judge, and here he uses the Israelites as his weapon in a never-to-be repeated event that would ingrain in them the fear of God. For, God said that if they became like the Canaanites, then the tables would be turned, and they would suffer what they inflicted. God is a God of fearsome justice, and sin against him is infinitely serious. This is the vital backdrop that makes the grace revealed in the gospel of Christ so amazing and so necessary.

Read Genesis 15

Give thanks to God for his grace to you and pray for those who don't yet know him.

God had given the Israelites the land, but it remained for them to go and possess it. God told Joshua that he would give him every place where he would set his foot. This sounds simple, but in fact it was, from a human point of view, an intimidating venture. For wherever they would set their foot in Canaan they would find a strong and militant people swooping down upon them like a swarm of bees. However, God had told them that they should not be deterred by this. He told them that if they walked ahead trusting in his promise, despite the intimidation of the enemy, he would drive the people out before them. The promises of God are something you must walk ahead into. *As you step out* God will fulfil his promises in the process. God will not prove himself to you until you prove that you are willing to trust him. Often, we look for concrete assurance before we step forward in obedience to God. But concrete assurance comes after you step forward, and even then, it may not come straight away. Faith is being assured before you see the results. It is the conviction that God is faithful, and the willingness to risk all and entrust your life to him. Unless you are willing to trust God and step out into his purpose, letting go of whatever you must let go of to do so, your faith will forever remain empty. You will experience God as you trust him and walk with him step by step.

Read Joshua 1:1-9

Ask God where he might be calling you to step out in faith.

Pray for the strength and courage to take this step.

SPIRITUAL BATTLE

Joshua 1:1-9 & Ephesians 6:10-20

To connect with the story of Joshua we must from the start recognise that we too are on mission and that our mission involves a battle. We don't fight *against* people, we fight for them "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). The conquest was to be a once-off physical manifestation of this spiritual battle against a people who had become inextricably entwined with Satanic powers. By entwining themselves with Satan they also brought on themselves the judgement due to him. This is what will happen unless grace cuts the cords of this entwinement. And that is what Jesus came to do. The Joshua we are reading about here prefigures the second Joshua (Jesus), so there is no coincidence in the fact that they share the same name (in Hebrew). Their name means, 'God saves'. God's plan of salvation involves the deliverance of humanity from "the powers of this dark world". The first Joshua came to expel Satanic powers *with* their human hosts. The second Joshua came to expel Satanic powers *from* their human hosts. In both cases the battle is given to God's people to fight. God provides the power, but we are his instruments of deliverance. The connection between our work of deliverance and the power of God is *prayer*. As we go forth sharing the message of Christ (the Word=the sword of the Spirit) we do so prayerfully. The light of God is within you. Pray for strength and courage and then let it out so that darkness will be dispelled.

Read Joshua 1:1-9 again along with Ephesians 6:10-20

Ask God to give you strength of faith and courage
to share your testimony with others.

THURSDAY

5 NOV

THE SUCCESS OF OTHERS

Joshua 1:10-18

By the time Joshua was ready to cross the Jordan, the Israelites had already occupied a great deal of territory east of the Jordan. This would be the inheritance of the Reubenites, the Gadites and half of the tribe of Manasseh. Although these tribes already had their land, they were not permitted to rest until their brothers had occupied their land west of the Jordan. They were instructed to first help their brothers and then they could go back and settle in their land. This is because the conquest was not about people getting what they wanted. It was about God getting what he wanted. It wasn't about acquiring property, it was about establishing God's Kingdom. And this was a task for everyone. No one was permitted to rest, even if their share was won, until everyone had what God wanted for them. If your prayers and efforts pertain only to your own acquisitions, then your perspective has become distorted. Even if you are focused on your own ministry calling, if you *only* focus on this, then you have become too narrow minded. Focus is good, but it needs perspective. Your task is part of the bigger Kingdom building endeavour. If your ministry endeavours are succeeding, therefore, do not rest there. Pray and help someone whose ministry is *not* succeeding. Otherwise you may use the failure of others to bolster your pride. And if you are failing, don't be too proud to ask someone for help. All Christians in all churches must work together to see the Kingdom established in this world.

Read Joshua 1:10-18

Pray for a church or ministry that is struggling.

MERCY OVER JUDGEMENT

Joshua 2

FRIDAY
6 NOV

Whenever there are moments of judgement in the Bible they always stand as a background for an expression of grace. Grace is undeserved favour. We cannot appreciate grace if we do not appreciate the judgement that we naturally deserve. The story of the great flood (Genesis 6-9), for example, serves as the background for the salvation of humanity through Noah and his ark. So too the terrible judgement upon the Canaanites serves as the backdrop for God's purpose to show grace to humanity. This is beautifully prefigured by the story of Rahab who was a cult prostitute living in the most dangerous fortress city of Canaan. She wasn't saved because she was better than other inhabitants of Jericho. On the contrary, her livelihood was a core part of the problem. And yet there is no hesitation to spare her. That this willingness to save her was divinely sanctioned is confirmed by the fact that she is listed in Hebrews as a hero of the faith! (Hebrews 11:31; see also James 2:25.) Moreover, she is even included in the genealogy of Christ! (Matthew 1:5) Matthew, the former corrupt tax-collector, must have been encouraged to discover that she was an ancestor of Christ, so he does the opposite of hiding it. Rahab stands as a sign that God "does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Repentance and faith are the 'scarlet cord' that assures anyone and everyone that they may be saved by the blood of Christ. His death was the ultimate moment of divine judgement in which the grace of God shines to all.

Read Joshua 2

Thank God for the grace he has shown to you
and pray for those who haven't received him yet.

7/8 NOV

weekend

Flying the Standard High – 1 Peter **1:13-2:2**

Christians are carriers of an unbearable truth. We carry the truth about the high and glorious calling of human beings, of all that we were created to be. In doing this, however, we are upholding a standard that exposes our failure. We carry the very truth that appears to condemn us. We are like thieves carrying signboards that read “you shall not steal”. So, we are branded as hypocrites, because we have failed to practice what we preach. And we are told to stop proclaiming an impossibly high ideal. Many Christians therefore lower the standard, they exchange the ideal for the real, the divine nature for human nature, what *ought* to be for what *is*. In doing so, however, they misunderstand why we uphold such a lofty standard. We hold it high precisely because it no longer condemns us. We hold it high to celebrate the grace that comes to sinful people through Jesus Christ. To lower the standard is to cheapen the grace. We hold it high because it is the blueprint of the sacred temple that God is rebuilding. We are not advertising what we are, but what we are slowly becoming. We uphold it to remember our incompleteness. We hold it joyfully because we are being transformed by God, and we hold it humbly because we are unfinished and still a messy worksite. So, fly the standard high and let it be the banner of grace over your life. Let it remind you of what you have been forgiven *of* and forgiven *for*.

Read 1 Peter 1:13-2:2. Ask God to show you your failures and to transform you by his Holy Spirit.