February 7

Happy Monday, everyone.

This week we will look briefly at the sixth book of the bible, the book of Joshua. It is so named because it largely focuses on the battles conducted by the Jewish leader Joshua as the Israelites enter and seek to subdue and conquer the Promised Land. Recall that of all the original Jewish people who fled Egypt during the Exodus, only Joshua and Caleb are actually allowed to enter the Promised Land. All the rest perished during the 40 years of wandering as a consequence of their sin and disobedience. Joshua and Caleb enter with the second generation of Jewish people.

Two major themes of the book are actually introduced right off the bat in the first chapter. The first is this: **God never leaves our side.**

From an historical perspective, (though remember that the Bible is not intended to be a history book), the prospect of entering what was then known largely as Canaan and Palestine would have been overwhelming and intimidating. It was fully populated with established pagan populations that were well versed in warfare. The Israelites were largely untested in prolonged battles and warfare, and they were the invaders onto a land with which they were completely unfamiliar. No doubt Joshua, who the Lord chose as Moses’ successor, must have thought, much like Moses did, “What have I gotten myself into?”

And yet God reminds him of an everlasting and steadfast truth: “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you” (1:5).

The Hebrew word used here for “leave” is *raphah* (pronounced raw-faw). It can also mean “fail” or “allow to sink.” God is telling Joshua even before the battle begins, “I will not fail you… I will not allow you to sink.”

Think of it. The God of all the majesty of Creation is telling Joshua, and is telling us here and now, “No matter the odds, no matter what you face, I will not fail you. I will not leave you. I will not allow you to sink. I will not forsake you.”

I love how God speaks here, and throughout Scripture, in absolutes. For us, “never” is rarely never. (“I will never eat another cheeseburger.”) But for God, “never” is always “never.”

So, as it was in Joshua, so is it with us. God will never leave us. God will never fail us. God will never forsake us. That doesn’t mean we don’t have to fight the battle. Joshua fought many of them, and some he lost. Many were wounded and died. But through it all, and through our all, **God never leaves our side.**

IHS,
Pastor Lou

February 8

Grace and peace to you this day.

A former colleague of mine, let’s call him Mike, grew up in a family of four boys in the Austin neighborhood on the West Side of Chicago. His parents were second generation Irish immigrants. His mom was a homemaker, and his dad was a fireman with the City of Chicago. In Mike’s words, his dad was “old school and tough as nails.”

One day, when his parents were out shopping, the boys, as they often did, got in a fight (I’m one of three boys, no girls. Believe me, it never took much for a fight to break out.) In any case, during the course of it, one of the boys bumped into the China cabinet causing some of the nice Irish porcelain that was brought over from the old country by their mother’s mother to fall on the floor and break. It was not only a family heirloom, but it was also a reminder of their heritage that was proudly in display in their little city bungalow. It was priceless, and it was irreplaceable.

When the parents got home, the mother started to cry, and the dad was furious. He said to his four sons, “You guys wanna fight? Fine. In the basement.” Off they went.

Once they were in the basement, they thought they were going to have to fight each other. But to their surprise, and to their horror, Dad took off his shirt, held up his fists in a boxing stance, and said, “Who’s first?” In Mike’s words, “whatever small amount of courage we had turned to complete fear to the point of panic.”

Joshua faced the same odds. A tough and determined enemy ready to fight. And yet, in the face of his fear, this is what the Lord says: “Be strong and courageous” (1:6). I wonder if Joshua thought “easy for you to say.” He must have been hesitant and timid because not once, not twice, not three times, but four times did the Lord admonish Joshua to be strong and courageous, and even, as is the case in verse 7, to be “strong and very courageous.”

In times of difficulty, our courage will certainly falter if we rely solely on ourselves. However, if we rely on the Lord, this is what He says to Joshua then, and to us today: “Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (1:9). As we saw yesterday, our God of eternity never leaves our side, and our God of omnipresence (meaning He is present everywhere) is at our side wherever we are, and wherever we go.

Amazing. The God who transforms larva into butterflies, who cast the stars among the Milky Way, and whose Spirit resides in your heart and mine, never leaves your side, wherever you are. Today, I encourage you: whatever your circumstances, take His hand. He’s waiting for you, right there at your side, wherever you are.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

February 9

Greetings to you in the name of our Savior, Jesus the risen Christ.

Our lesson for today is what I refer to as this: God’s accommodation. Consider this:

In chapter 10, Joshua is facing the armies of the combined forces of the five kings of the Amorites. Joshua asked the Lord to make “the sun stand still” so there would be enough daylight to win the battle. This is how it is recorded:

“On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel:

'Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.'

So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar.

The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a human being. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!” (10:12-14).

God seemingly makes the sun stand still for a full day, allowing Joshua victory in battle. But here’s the thing: the sun stands still anyway. Non-believers often point to this passage as evidence that the Bible cannot be taken literally; that its truths cannot be trusted. I say, this passage proves that the opposite is true. It proves God’s grace and His accommodation of His people. Here’s what I mean.

In Joshua’s time, there was no understanding of astronomy as we understand it today. There was no knowledge that, in fact, the earth revolves around the sun while spinning on a tilted axis, while the moon is revolving around the earth. Instead, it was believed that the sun moved around the earth. If, upon Joshua’s request, instead of simply accommodating him, the Lord said, “Well, let me tell you how it really works…,” Joshua would have had no way of understanding it, and if he did, would have been considered at best, insane, and at worst, a heretic. And the battle would have been lost.

There are so many things that I don’t understand. Scientists still don’t understand the nature of things that are all around us, like gravity, or why the Cubs can only win one World Series per century. But I do know this, in our limited human understanding, a gracious and all-knowing God accommodates us. Moreover, He provides us with what I think is something we will truly never understand until we are with Him in eternity: the amazing, immeasurable sacrifice made by His Son on the cross.
As the sun stood still that day providing Joshua with victory, so did the Son submit that day on a hill called Calvary, providing you, and me with another victory. The victory over sin, and the victory over the tomb.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

February 10
Greetings, DGCC Family.

One of my favorite scenes in all of literature is the Saint Crispin’s Day speech from Shakespeare’s play *Henry V*. It recounts the actual historical event of the Battle of Agincourt, which the British, greatly outnumbered and led by King Henry V, fought against a superior French force near the town of Agincourt, France in 1415. The British, total underdogs but armed with longbows, defeated a French army that outnumbered them by three to one.

In his play, Shakespeare has King Henry rally his fearful and demoralized troops, who are wanting to either wait for more men or surrender on merciful terms. Henry will have none of it. Instead, he tells his cousin Westmoreland to allow anyone who doesn’t want to fight to go ahead and leave. This is what he says, in part:

“Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host, That he which hath no stomach to this fight, let him depart; his passport shall be made, And crowns for convoy put into his purse; We would not die in that man's company That fears his fellowship to die with us.”

Later on, he refers to those men who choose to stay and fight as “we, this band of brothers,” which is where the phrase originates.

At the end of the book of Joshua, Joshua makes a similar speech. Only he’s not rallying the Israelites to battle, he’s rallying them to faith. This is what he famously says:

“No fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (24:14-15).

Maybe I’m old school, and more so as I get older. So be it. But let me say today to the men out there: you’re the spiritual head of your household. Set the example. Come to church. Pray at mealtime. If you’re married, honor your wife. Set an example for your sons and daughters. In other words, “Choose ye this day wo you will serve…”

IHS, Pastor Lou
February 11

Happy Friday, everyone!

Here’s your musical devotional for today. This is a good one to share with your kids or grandkids. Turn up the volume and enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfPOHQOc3uI

IHS,
Pastor Lou