

The Man Who Lived on Promises

By Warren Wiersbe

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Sunday, January 1, 1995

Iglesia Bautista Betania

851 South Breyfogle Rd.

Mission, Texas 78572

Website: www.ministeriosbetania.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/betania

You again and a few new folks are here tonight and I appreciate your coming.

Abraham kept going because he saw the city of God and we learn that heaven is not just a destination, heaven is a motivation. Keep your eyes on glory. Nehemiah kept going because he saw the greatness of God, the great and awesome God. And God is a great God and idolatry brings God down to our size, and that's no God at all. Tonight we want to look at Joshua, so turn to Joshua chapter 1 and we're going to find out what kept Joshua going. As Dr. V. Raymond Edmond used to say, it's always too soon to quit. Always too soon to quit.

I think it would have been difficult to be Joshua. Twice in my ministry, it stands now about 45 years, 46 years, twice in my ministry I've had to follow men who were legends in their own time. One was D. B. Estep. You may not have heard of him, but he'd been at this church for 35 years, built a great church. And he invited me to come to be his associate and we looked forward to many years together where we could preach and share. He was getting older, he had a heart attack, but he'd apparently gotten over it. He'd go out in conference ministry and I'd preach at home, and I'd go out and he'd preach at home and it was really too ideal, and after about six months of that, the Lord called him home. But to follow a man who'd been there for 35 years, his fingerprints were on every doorknob and it wasn't easy. And then at Back to the Bible, I followed a man who'd founded the work and been there for 45 years and it wasn't easy, and here's Joshua following a great man like Moses who opened the Red Sea, who brought down manna from heaven. That wouldn't be an easy job. Here's a brand new generation, the old generation had died off. At Kadesh Barnea, God said, "Okay, you don't believe me? You're afraid you're going to die? That's what you'll do. You'll die. And I'm going to start with everybody who's 20 and younger and build myself a new nation." And so they had the world's longest funeral march, and out of that whole crowd of the older people, only two survived, Joshua and Caleb. And at least once a week, Joshua and Caleb would meet for coffee and Joshua would say, "How many did you bury last week?" Caleb would say, "Hey, the best is yet to come. We're going to enter the Promised Land. Hallelujah."

So here's Joshua taking over the nation, a new generation, and I'm wondering what it was that carried him through and he tells us, I'm always glad when people tell us things. Look at Joshua. Keep your place in Joshua 1, but just turn back to chapter 21 of Joshua, verse 43. "So the LORD gave to Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers,

and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The LORD gave them rest all around according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all the enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand." Now here's the great word, "Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass." Now just turn the page to chapter 23 when Joshua gives his farewell address. There are a number of farewell addresses in the Bible that you'd do well to study. One is Joshua. He's going to die. Another is Moses. It's like the whole book of Deuteronomy, I suppose, could be considered his farewell address. David gave a farewell address. Our Lord Jesus in the Upper Room gave a farewell address. Paul gave a farewell address, and that's chapter 20. Someday you may give a farewell address, and it may be sooner than we think. People are dying that never died before. I wanted to ask my friend, Howard Sudgen, who's now in glory, he lived in Michigan all of his ministry except for a few years in Canada, I said, "Howard, what's the death rate in Michigan?" He said, "One apiece."

Joshua 23:14, "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed." Do you know what kept Joshua going? The promises of God. The promises of God. If like Abraham, I keep my eyes lifted to the city of God, and if like Nehemiah, I let my heart be caught up in the greatness of God, and if like Joshua, I can live on the promises of God, I'll make it by the grace of God.

Have you come to the place in your Christian walk where you've discovered that we do not live on explanations? We live on promises. When I was a young pastor, people would come and say, "Well, why did this happen?" And I knew. I knew. I had an explanation for everything. And then I found out I was wrong most of the time and I don't explain anymore. People come up and say, "Well, why did God do this?" I say, "I don't know." "You don't?" "No, I don't. He hasn't told me. And anyway, I don't live on explanations. I live on promises."

Some years ago, our older son, who's a pastor now, decided to be heroic when he was an assistant director of a camp, and they were playing baseball, and he decided to slide into home plate and be very dramatic. But home plate happened to be a hunk of concrete. Well, that's the way, you know, get a low-budget camp, those things... And in being heroic and sliding into home plate, David broke his leg. So they took him to the hospital and x-rayed it, and of course they set it and put a cast on it and everything. Now, imagine the doctor comes in with a fistful of x-rays. He says, "Young man, I want to explain to you how your leg was broken." That makes you feel so good. I remember when I had my gallbladder out, the doctor came in and had this container. He said, "You want to see what I took out of you?" I said, "No." No, it doesn't make you feel any better. So the doctor hangs up these x-rays, and he shows how the neck bone is connected to the shoulder bone, and the shoulder bone is connected to the whatever, and they're all connected to the wallet, and my son is lying there in pain. Now, explanations don't make you feel any better. If you did know, what difference does it make? The doctor was too

smart. He walks in and says, "Well, son, I'm sorry this happened, but I want to tell you something, in eight weeks you're going to be walking again." That I can live on.

We don't live on explanations, we live on promises. Chapter 1 of the book of Joshua, the Holy Spirit of God talks to us about five dangers, five dangers in Christian ministry that are overcome if you live on promises. Joshua chapter 1. "After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant." That's interesting. Joshua's got to start carrying Moses' luggage. He's got to start setting up Moses' tent. He was Moses' assistant. So often in scripture we find the pattern, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a few things. I'll make you a ruler over many things." David got his start taking care of some sheep. He was faithful. God promoted him. Joseph got his start taking care of some sheep and taking care of some prisoners, and then God promoted him. That's the way God does things. He tries us out as servants over a few things, and if he finds we're faithful, then he can move us to being rulers over many things.

And God said to him, "Moses My servant, is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them--the children of Israel." Now the first danger that has to be overcome in ministry is the danger of looking back. For 40 years, Moses had been their leader. Joshua is now taking over. Moses is dead. Moses is a great man. The people mourn the loss of Moses. Moses is mentioned six times in these first nine verses. Moses is mentioned 57 times in the book of Joshua. And God said to Joshua, "Don't look back." Wesley said, "God buries His workmen and His work goes on." Now we don't think that. We sometimes have the idea that unless So-and-so is in charge, nothing is going to happen right. I have lived long enough to see many people come on the scene and leave the scene, and guess what? The church goes on. The church goes on.

The danger of looking back. Now this doesn't mean they ignored the past. As I said, Moses is mentioned 57 times in this book so they didn't ignore the past. When I became General Director of Back to the Bible, I didn't obliterate the name of Theodore F., the great founder of that work. No, no, we learned from him. But my job was not to embalm the past. The past is important. Those who do not know the past are condemned to repeat it, said George Santayana. That's true. Some of the younger folks need to catch up on the past. I wrote a couple of books about the giants of the past, "Walking with the Giants," and "Listening to the Giants," and "Giant Steps," and other combined, and "Living with the Giants," for the simple reason I discovered that many of my young preacher friends didn't know who Alexander Maclaren was or what he had done. They had never heard of Samuel Rutherford. And these are the giants and we are pygmies standing on the shoulders of these giants.

Well, Moses was a giant and God said, "Don't forget Moses. Moses is important." But folks, the past is not an anchor to hold us back, it's a rudder to guide us. And he didn't tell Joshua to embalm the past. He didn't tell Joshua so to memorialize the past that there was no future. No, no. He said, "Now Moses did his job and Moses is dead. Don't look back." The great danger that the Jews had, of course, was looking back. Whenever they got in

hot water, they looked back. We talked about that this morning, back to Egypt, and that's always a danger.

Now, there's a second danger here, because God had given Joshua these promises, and of course you well know that passage where he says in verse 7, "be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do all, according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you." Verse 8, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth." He says, "Now Joshua, you're going to live on the word of God, the promises of God. That will keep you from looking back. There's a land up here, and that's what I'm going to give you." Which leads us to verse 4, 3 and 4. "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory." Here's the second danger: the danger of standing still. Standing still. We sing the song, "Standing on the Promises." Vance Havner used to say, most of the people who sing "Standing on the Promises" are only sitting on the premises. There's some truth to that. But you don't just stand on the promises, you know what you do? You walk out by faith, believing those promises. True faith in the promises of God leads to motion.

And God admonished Joshua, "There's a land out here, I have promised to give you this land, I will give you this land. Here's My promise, now get moving." Now he said the same thing to Abraham. Back when Abraham and Lot had their difference and their separation, and after Lot moved off toward Sodom, there stands Abraham and God shows up and says, "Abraham, lift up your eyes. I want you to look east and west and north and south. You see all this land? Lot's gone over here and he's moved into Sodom. Lot has boundaries. Lot's life is now bounded by the limits of Sodom. But I want you to lift up your eyes. I'm not going to give you boundaries, I'm going to give you horizons. And all of this is yours. Now, don't just lift up your eyes and look, lift up your feet and walk for every place where the sole of your foot touches, that's yours!" That's what God said to Abraham. That's what God said to Joshua and to Israel. "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you." We call that stepping out by faith.

Now, I suppose anybody can step out by faith on solid ground. Peter dared to step out by faith on water. You say he began to sink. That's all right, he knew he was sinking. I know some people who are drowning and don't know it. At least he knew when he was sinking, and he knew that when he was sinking, he could cry out to Jesus and Jesus would save him. But I want to remind you, the other eleven men did not walk on the water. Peter did. And not only that, when Jesus caught him, Jesus and Peter, arm in arm, just walked on the water back to the boat. I'm convinced that Peter began to sink, not only because he looked around and saw the wind and the waves, got his eyes off of Jesus, but those eleven men back there in the boat were watching, and Peter's doing pretty good until Thomas hollers out, "Look out, here comes a big one!" The danger of standing still because if we stand still, we sink. If we stand still, we go backward. And the work of the Lord cannot stand still.

It's unfortunate that some of our churches, and that's not true here, but some of our churches are just content to be religious clubs. They're standing still. "Oh, we've got a building, we have a staff, we love each other and enjoy each other, so don't let too many outsiders come in, you know. We sort of have an exclusive meeting going on here." Dr. Ironside used to tell about a religious group, I won't name the denomination, that met in an upstairs hall, and they had a sign outside that said, "Jesus Only." That's a good sign, "Jesus Only." And the wind blew some of the letters away, and it read, "us Only." That's the way some people are. The danger of standing still, we have to reach forward and move ahead and how do you do that? You claim the promises of God. You see, promises are for today, not yesterday. You can't claim promises yesterday. You can claim yesterday's promises today for tomorrow. So when you live by the promises of God, you have to live for the future.

Now, there's a third danger we have to watch out for: the danger of looking back, and the danger of standing still, and the danger of giving up. He had a tough job ahead of him. There were 31 kings in Canaan waiting for him to come. His first challenge was Jericho, with its tall walls and its gates. He had a tough job ahead of him. I have yet to see anybody who has an easy task who's serving God. The Bible says, "Quit you like men. Be strong." In other words, act the man, act the woman.

"No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life." What a promise. "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you." What a promise. By the way, that's the same promise God gave to Isaac in Genesis 26. He said, "I will not leave you." Same promise he gave to Jacob three times. When Jacob left home, God met him at Bethel and God said, "I'm not going to leave you until I accomplish what I want to accomplish." That encourages me. That's the Old Testament version of Philippians 1:6, Genesis 28:15. And then he repeated it in Genesis 31. And then he repeated it again in Genesis 46. "I am not going to leave you. I am not going to forsake you." He gave it to Moses, what he called Moses. And you remember how Moses argued with God. You've never done that, but Moses argued with God. He said, "I can't speak, and I can't do this, and I can't do that, and I can't do something else. Here am I, Lord, send Aaron." But God gave it to Moses. God repeated it through Moses to Israel. Deuteronomy 31. He will not leave you. He will not forsake you until he's accomplished what he promised.

You're in Joshua 1, just turn back a page or two to Deuteronomy 31. Moses in chapter 31, verse 6, says to the Jewish nation, "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you." Then he turned to Joshua, his successor. It's rather interesting, Moses laid hands on Joshua to be his successor. Joshua didn't lay hands on anybody to be his successor. God doesn't always repeat everything the same way. "Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, 'Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.'"

So God gave it to Isaac, and God gave it to Jacob, and God gave it to Moses, and God gave it to Israel, and God gave it to Joshua, and God gave it to us. You know that. Hebrews chapter 13. Better look at it. Hebrews chapter 13, verse 5, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" When you live by the promises of God, you overcome the danger of looking back, and the danger of standing still, and the danger of giving up. It's always too soon to quit.

Well, we must move on. Back to Joshua chapter 1, verse 6, "Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them." There's a danger of falling short. Now let me explain what I mean by that. There are in the Old Testament only three geographic positions. All kinds of geography. I'm not great on geography. I know two directions, up and down. My wife is the navigator in our family and she just has it all worked out. A built-in radar. It's amazing. But in scripture, you're going to find only three geographical locations spiritually and there's a whole book written about it, the book of Hebrews. The first geographic location is Egypt. Egypt is a picture of the world system keeping people in bondage. Always amazed me when the Jewish people said, "We want to go back to Egypt where we had all that free stuff." Free? They worked. I mean, a Jewish man would invest his whole life moving a stone to build some building. Bondage.

So Egypt represents bondage and they were delivered from Egypt by the blood of the Lamb. Now I was once in bondage to the world and the flesh and the devil, and when I trusted Jesus, he delivered me from Egypt, delivered me from bondage because he died for me. Now his plan was to let me claim my inheritance. That's Canaan. The songwriters, some of the songwriters and poets have used Canaan as a picture of heaven but Canaan is not a picture of heaven. Some of the old hymns say we're going to cross the Jordan and go into Canaan land, and I'm bound for the Promised Land and so forth. Many of the spirituals are written that way but that's not biblical. That's not biblical. Canaan represents your inheritance in Jesus for you to claim, and those of us who are right now, not in heaven but right now, those of us who are in places of leadership like Joshua, our responsibility is to help our people find their inheritance, stake their claim and enjoy it. The pastor watches people and prays about people, elders watch people and pray about people, and someone says, "You know, I think that Joe has a gift of mercy. I've been watching him. He has a heart for people and I think we could put him in charge of searching out and finding folks who need help. That's his gift." That's Canaan. It would be an awful thing to make him treasurer and then discover he can't count. Or instrumentalist, you know, many churches have synthesizers and they have pianos and somehow people get to these instruments, not here but in other places, people get to these instruments and have a rough time. They play very biblically, their right hand doesn't know what their left hand is doing. And many of the problems in our churches come from good people being in the wrong place. They just aren't made for it.

So, he says to Joshua, "Your job is going to be get into Canaan land, conquer the land and then stake out all the inheritance so that each one has their place, every tribe is marked out, every family, every clan is marked out. And so that these people can go to work, enjoy the land and serve Me." That's what church is all about. God saved me from Egypt. He said, "Now I want you to, by faith, enter into your inheritance. I'll help you fight the battles. I'll help you win the victories. I'll help you claim the spoils. I will give to you, as long as you walk by faith and claim My promises, I will give to you your inheritance." David wrote in Psalm 16, "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places." What's he talking about? Inheritance. He's saying, "The plot of ground in this life that God marked out for me is so pleasant." You may say, "Well, my plot's not so good." Well, we have our problems, no question about that.

So, Egypt, bondage. Canaan, inheritance. Find out what God wants me to do, what inheritance he wants me to claim and do it, but in between is a third geographical location, the wilderness. Now, you know the story. The Jewish people left Egypt, spent a couple of years around Mount Sinai, and then they said, "Okay, we're going to go to Kadesh Barnea. We're going to enter into Canaan land and claim our inheritance." They got there and somebody said, "Don't you think we ought to appoint a committee?" And Moses said, "Well, I guess so. What are you going to do?" "Well, we're going to spy out the land." So they had 12 men, one from each tribe. Sent them in. They were gone for 40 days, came back. They said, "You know what? It's exactly the way God said it was." Surprise. Big surprise. Isn't everything the way God says it is? Sure. "And we saw these marvelous, marvelous farms and we saw but...", oh, now you get the majority report now, "but..." I think you've noticed in insurance policies and other things that the big print gives and the small print takes away. You ever notice that? So, they came with their report. "It's exactly as God said. It's a marvelous land. Oh, it's a land of milk and honey. It's a land where you can dig metal ore out of the ground. It's a marvelous land! As we looked, we saw the giants. Then we looked higher and we saw the walls. The walls are high and the giants are big and we are not able to claim our inheritance."

Now, if they'd looked a little higher, they would have seen God. They would have said, "Well, that giant's pretty big, but God's bigger. That wall's pretty high, but God can handle that." That's what Joshua and Caleb said. That's the minority report now. So often in scripture, the majority's wrong. Not always, but often. And so, for the next 40, well, actually 38 years, but you add the two years they were out of Egypt, they're 40 years wandering around. That's what the book of Hebrews says. Book of Hebrews says, "Are you going to enter into your inheritance or are you going to turn away His word? Are you going to believe His promises and claim what He has for you?" Somebody here tonight is wrestling with a decision to move. You're praying about it. The devil's saying, "You can't do it. It's too big for you." But God wants you to. That's part of your inheritance. God picked us up from northern Indiana and moved us to Wheaton, Illinois. He had some inheritance there for us. And then he picked us up from Wheaton, Illinois and moved us down to Covington, Kentucky because he had some more inheritance there for us to claim. Then he picked us up from Covington, took us to Chicago, to Moody Church, because there were some people there that I was supposed to guide into their inheritance in Jesus. Then he picked us up from there and put us in Lincoln, Nebraska to a radio

ministry because there were some people who needed to have their ministry, their inheritance, pointed out to them.

God is a great God and you say, "Oh, but when I consider all of this, man, the walls are high and the giants are big," and God says, "Well, whatever happened to My promises?" Remember, we don't live on explanations, we live on promises and there's the danger of falling short. When you claim the promises of God, you divide the inheritance, you enter in and claim it according to verse 6. Now verses 7 through 9, there's a fifth danger we have to watch out for. The danger of looking back and the danger of standing still, the danger of giving up, verse 5, nobody is going to be able to stand before you, don't give up, the danger of falling short, you're going to claim your inheritance and you trust his promises. Now 7, 8 and 9, "Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper," that means be successful in whatever you do. "This Book of the Law," meaning the Old Testament scripture that they had up to that point, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth." It's a strange place to carry your Bible. The word "meditate," he goes on to talk about that, "but you shall meditate in it day and night." The Hebrew word for "meditate" means "to mutter." Mutter. If you've been to Jerusalem and you've gone down to the Wailing Wall, you've seen this in action. My wife and I were flying somewhere, I don't remember where, and across the plane from us, it was an overseas trip, across the plane from us was a Jewish man. I could tell because first thing in the morning as the sun came up, I was up and reading my Bible, sitting there in the seat reading my Bible and meditating, I looked and he'd put on his prayer shawl and he had his prayer book out and I could hear him because when a Jewish person meditates on the word of God, they mutter, they speak the word.

And so God says to Joshua, "Now Joshua, I want this word to be in your mouth. I want you to talk about it. I want you to talk to yourself about it, meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." There is the danger here of taking over. What he's quietly saying to Joshua is, "Joshua, this is My enterprise. You're working for Me. I give you the word, you don't invent the word. I give you the directions, you don't figure things out." Twice in this book he forgot that. Twice in the book of Joshua, the great General Joshua forgot so as a consequence, he failed. One was at Ai. They conquered Jericho and Ai was next on the agenda and Joshua said, "Well, let's send a committee up to investigate." So he did send some people up and came back with statistics. There are three kinds of lies: white lies, black lies, and statistics and you can prove anything with statistics. They thought it was a small place. It's just a place that's so small the zip code is a fraction. Don't worry about it. You can always tell when you're in a small town when you get a wrong number, they talk to you for 25 minutes. "Ai is just a bump in the road. We don't need the whole army, just a couple of thousand people." And so they figured out their strategy, but they didn't talk to God about it. They forgot what God said to

Joshua, "This Book of the Law." "I'm the one who's going to take care of it now," and they failed because there was an enemy in the camp, Achan.

Second time was when the Gibeonites showed up. They were smart. The Gibeonites were the next in line. They said, "Boy, we're going to get it." And so they dressed like they had been on the road a long time. The bread was moldy and their shoes were worn out. Looked like fugitives and came into the camp and Joshua walked by sight, not by faith. He should have said, "Let call a prayer meeting now and find out what this is all about." "Oh, we're from a far country and we've heard about you and we want to be your allies." So they signed the contract and then discovered they were their next door neighbors. You know why they failed? They didn't talk to God about it. The danger of taking over.

Now just turn the page to Joshua chapter 5, verse 13. Joshua chapter 5 and verse 13. They've crossed the Jordan. They're in the land. They're about to do business with Jericho. "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him," I like that kind of courage, "and said to Him, 'Are You for us or for our adversaries?'" I like that kind of conviction. It's one or the other. He didn't say, "Now where are You on this spectrum? I mean, do You like us or do You just hate us a little bit?" No. "My Lord said you're either for me or against me." There's no neutrality.

"So He said, 'No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.'" It was Jesus. "And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, 'What does my Lord say to His servant?'" It's a good question to start every day. "Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, 'Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.' And Joshua did so." Chapter 6, verse 2, "And the LORD said to Joshua: 'See! I have given Jericho into your hand.'" The other great danger in Christian ministry, and especially in leadership, is that we take over. I used to say when I was a pastor, "Well, not in my church." It's not my church. There's no place in the Bible that says my church. I know what we mean when we say that, the people whom I pastor, the folks who called me, but that's wrong, my church. "Well, in my ministry." It's not your ministry, it's God's. It better be. The danger of taking over. I've watched ministries be marvelously blessed of God and leaders, God's hand is upon them, then they take over and God says, "Okay, you can have it your way and that's it."

Now, in this encounter that night, Joshua learned a number of very practical lessons. Number one, he learned he wasn't alone. That encourages me. Every once in a while, my Lord has had to come to me and say, "Hey, don't be afraid, I'm here." Joshua knew that he was not alone. Sometimes leadership can be very lonely. Very lonely. It's very lonely at the top. We can't always tell people what we'd like to tell them and though we have confidants and mentors, sometimes it's very lonely. We have to make decisions that involve people. Lonely. He discovered he wasn't alone. Paul went to Corinth and began to preach the gospel and got thrown out of the synagogue, so he went next door and, oh, things were rough, and he was contemplating moving on to someplace else until Jesus showed up. Acts chapter 18, the Lord Jesus came to Paul and said, "Paul, don't go away. Stay here. I have many people in this city." Now, if Paul had been like some extreme

theologian, he would have said, "Well, if You've got some people in this city, go ahead and get them. I'm going someplace else." No. No, it doesn't work that way. It doesn't work that way. The same God who ordains the end, ordains the means to the end, and the means to the end was Paul and his witness, and Paul knew that people were going to be saved because God had his people in that city and that encouraged him to preach. And people did get saved. He said, "Jesus is with me." At the end of his life, Paul said, "Everybody forsook me." Can you imagine that? Paul's in Rome, facing trial, and everybody forsook him and he's standing alone, the great Apostle Paul. But then he goes on to say, "But the Lord stood with me."

So he discovered, Joshua discovered he was not alone. Secondly, he discovered he was second in command. Blessed is the person who discovers he's second in command, she's second in command. "I'm the commander of this whole outfit." Oh? Now, Joshua was a very well-trained man. He'd begun his life in Egypt as a slave, then he became a soldier, and then he became the leader of the Hebrew army, and he was Moses' assistant and now he was Moses' successor. He was a well-trained man but all that training meant nothing if he was first in command but Joshua discovered he was second in command. It's a great liberation day when you discover you're second in command.

He also discovered that night that he was on holy ground. Now, I wouldn't have thought Jericho was holy ground, I would have thought it was unholy ground, but wherever God puts you, it's holy ground. We've had some preachers forget that they're always on holy ground. The motel room you're in, that's holy ground. God put you there.

He discovered he was on holy ground but the greatest discovery he made that night was he discovered he had already won the battle. God, Jesus said to him, "Now, see, I have given Jericho to you. It's a done thing. Just follow My instructions, and you've got it." And that's exactly what happened. There's a great danger in taking over, great danger, of making my will substitute for God's will and my plans for God's plan, my name for God's name. It's a dangerous thing. The Bible has a word for it. It's called pride. Pride.

Have you ever studied the three men in the Bible who ended up in the dark? Scary. Pretty scary. King Saul ended up in the dark. Had a battle coming. He didn't have any word from God because God had abandoned him so he went out in the darkness to a witch to find out what he should do. You know what the ruin of King Saul was? Pride. Pride. Samson ended up in the dark. Blinded him. Put his eyes out. And Samson's great failure was lust. Judas. John chapter 13 says, "And Judas went out, and it was night." We knew it was night. It was Passover. We knew it was night. Now, John didn't put that there just to put it. He was saying, "Judas went out, and it was night for Judas." And it's still night for Judas and it always will be night for Judas. And Judas' big problem was money. Now, these are the three great enemies of leadership. Pride. Lust. Money. And you end up in the dark. All three of these men committed suicide. There's a sense in which Samson could be considered a martyr because he killed others when he killed himself but he tragically took his own life, so did Saul, and so did Judas. Samson lived for the lust of the flesh and it caught up with him. When I was in seminary, they said there are three things

you have to watch out for if you're going to be in ministry: pride, lust, money. It will ruin you.

And Joshua discovered that night he was on holy ground, he was second in command, he was not alone and he had already won the battle because Joshua lived on promises. The minute Jesus said, "See, I have given." Not I will give. Not I might give. "I have given Jericho into your hands." And Joshua, who was one of the first promise keepers in the Bible, Joshua said, "Hey, I'm going to keep that promise. Okay, men," he got his men together, "We've already won the battle. All we have to do is do what Jesus tells us to do." If you want to keep going, claim the promises of God.

Now I'm going to meddle just a minute and then we'll close. Do you spend time every day in the Book? Now you don't have to tell me, it's a rhetorical question. Do you start your day or at some point in your day where it's the best for you, you open the word and you are systematically reading through the word? The psalmist said, "I rise early in the morning to meditate on Your word." The psalmist said, "I anticipate the night watches to meditate on Your word." Here's a man that got up early and stayed up late and meditated on the word. Claiming the promises of God is what gives us sticking power but many saints of God do not take time to be holy. They can't start the day with the Lord.

Years ago there was a godly Methodist bishop whose name was Ralph Spaulding Cushman. This is what he wrote.

"I met God in the morning, When my day was at its best,
And His Presence came like sunrise Like a glory in my breast.
All day long the Presence lingered, All day long He stayed with me,
And we sailed in perfect calmness O'er a very troubled sea.
Other ships were blown and battered, Other ships were sore distressed,
But the winds that seemed to drive them Brought to me a perfect rest.
Then I thought of other moorings, With a keen remorse of mind,
How I too had left my harbor, With the Pilate far behind.
So I think I've learned the secret, Learned from many a troubled way:
You must meet God in the morning If you would have Him all the day."

When you read the book of Joshua you find how many times Joshua got up early in the morning not to watch "Good Morning, Israel," not to see how his stocks were doing, to meet his Commander and get his orders for the day. Are you meeting God in the morning or do you say, "I'm so tired when I wake up"? Then go to bed earlier. "Oh, but I'm so busy." Well then, get some priorities because the most important part of a leader's life is the part that only God sees and if somehow you're able to push through and get your work done without meditating, without praying, that work's not going to last. "Without Me you can do nothing." And so I want to be like Joshua and I think you want to be like Joshua who kept on going because he claimed the promises of God, but you can't claim them unless you know them. You can't know them unless you read them. You can't claim them unless you pray by faith and meet God every day.

Our Father, we come, some of us to confess the sin of carelessness and lack of discipline. Help us to determine that we shall begin the day at the feet of our Commander claiming the promises. We don't want to look back. We don't want to stand still. We don't want to miss the inheritance You have for us. And I pray Father, You will help us by Your grace and for Your glory to be the kind of leaders who are second in command. You have already won the victory and this is the victory that overcomes even our faith. Help us by faith to claim what You have for us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.