

Joshua 1:1-9 God's great commitment

Life can be scary at times! There are normal phobias that we talked about earlier, but then it gets worse – we're not in control! If you're someone who loves to be in control of things, then life is dreadful when you can't control what's going on. Being sick, either you or someone you love; unemployment; moving house; divorce – these are some of life's most stressful events and when they happen in our sphere of life, or even to us, then very rarely do we feel in control! Then it can get worse, when one of the bastions of support, strength and security, our church and the Christian faith, starts to change, then it multiplies that sense of fear that we feel. How do we handle these fears? There is the ostrich-school of dealing with our fears, pretending they don't exist and that they will go away; that doesn't work. Or we devise a plan, a strategy, of 3,4, or 5-steps to deal with all that is going on around us – but life doesn't always fit neatly into a 5-step plan; it tends to fall apart at step one! Let me offer you the Bible's way of dealing with being afraid.

Joshua was being given a big job: he was filling Moses' shoes. Moses had died just before Israel was about to cross into the Promised Land. There was grief to deal with here because their great leader had died, the man who had been at the head of things for 40 years, and who not there anymore and now there was no-one like him. Joshua had his personal grief to deal with as well as a people who were devastated that their leader was gone. Then it got worse: God called Joshua to be the leader in Moses' place. Here is the list of fears from earlier: Joshua might have been afraid that he wasn't good enough to fill Moses' shoes; or that the people wouldn't follow his leadership; or that his leadership skills weren't up to scratch; or that he was taking on new job for all the wrong reasons; or that God may let him down; or that he might have overestimated God's power. This is speculation to an extent, but it would not be surprising if all of these were going through his mind at this stage; these are huge questions and some of them are faith-related which always seems to make them bigger. What's the answer?

God doesn't have a 5-step strategy to help Joshua; he has a simple strategy with one element to it. "God is with you." Twice God says it: "*As I...*" (*Joshua 1:5*) "*Do not...*" (*Joshua 1:9*) That promise is both fantastically reassuring and supremely challenging at one and the same time. It is fantastically reassuring because basically God promises to be there with and for Joshua always and everywhere: God who created the universe, God who loved His people, God who divided the Red Sea, God who provided manna every day – this God promises to be with Joshua everywhere he goes; that's quite a promise; do we see size of that promise? It's huge! God is there; Joshua need not be afraid! There are days to come when that promise would be the most valuable word in Joshua's heart.

It is also supremely challenging, because to take it seriously was an act of faith. Joshua had to believe the promise if it was going to work! That's why, along with the promise, he is told to read his Bible, to listen to what it says, to chew it over in his heart and mind, then walk in the ways of the Lord. Reading his bible will strengthen his faith, will make it easier to trust Lord and His promises, and will make it easier to be the kind of man, the kind of leader that God wants him to be. To take the promise seriously is an act of faith, an act of trust in God. It doesn't make the scary things go away, but here are some tools to help us deal with the things that make us scared.

It is a fantastic promise: God is with us. Everywhere Joshua went God was there. When he stood on the edge of the river Jordan in spate, being told to put his foot in the water and cross over, God was there; when faced with the enemy city of Jericho, challenged to defeat it, God was there; in all of the next 24 chapters of his story, God was there with Joshua to help him. The promise has not gone way. Indeed, the promise is even stronger now than in Joshua's day because we have Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us in flesh and blood; in Jesus, God came

to live amongst us, to live in our world, to live in our flesh and blood. Before He left, Jesus gave us the words of promise with which we started service: *"I will..." (John 14:18)* and on Pentecost Jesus poured out His Spirit on His church, God with us ever since. The Church's great commission from Jesus to make disciples ends with this same promise: *"And surely..." (Matthew 28:20)*

See the promise for what it is! This is huge: Jesus who lived, died and was raised; Jesus for whom and by whom everything was made; Jesus who shares God's glory in heaven – this Jesus is with us everywhere and always. He is with us when we meet for worship, when we sit together around the Lord's Table, when we pray, when we're sitting by the fire watching TV, when we're at school, when talking with our friends, when awake in bed at 3am unable to sleep, when in hospital, when at the graveside of someone we've loved, when a baby is born, when sitting at your desk at work, making lunch, washing dishes, playing golf... The list is endless. Wherever we are and wherever we go, Jesus is with us. When Jesus is with us all His love and compassion, all His power, all His grace, goes to work for us. At 3am when the child is crying, awake, distraught, its parents' first words are not to scold, but to say "Mummy's here; Daddy's here!"

I don't know what makes you scared today. It might be life, it might be all kinds of things. It might be the building project, scared that it will change the church beyond what you recognise, or scared that the project will come to nothing. When we were talking about an opportunity for everyone to talk together about it and it became something that might happen on the Sunday when celebrate communion, at first I had reservations; it is appropriate? But the more I thought, actually the more appropriate it became because here we are, with different opinions and views about a building project, sitting together around the Lord's Table and Jesus is with us; together with Jesus we share bread and wine and we share His love with one another; what could be better! Then as people who have sat together and celebrated Jesus's death, sacrifice, love, then in a spirit of love and partnership and family, we can talk together about our project. Jesus is with us; He loves us; He is gracious to us; He forgives us; He died for us; He rose again; He is with us here, now, everywhere, always. Glory be to Jesus!