

“A Life Worth Living”

Joshua 1

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No matter how young or old we are, most of us want our lives to count for something – to know that our lives matter.

Certainly young people are readily captured by a mission and vision. That is a great quality of youth and it is powerful if the mission and vision are worthy of their lives.

It's sad when young lives are wasted pursuing the American materialistic dream **but it is exciting** to see young people giving themselves to serve others.

You can hear it in the different aspirations of those as young as high school age– many so **self-**centered and some so **others-**centered.

But it is not only young people who want their lives to count for something worthwhile.

Many of you men have read Bob Buford's comment in his book Halftime when at 40 years of age he wrote, “My life had more money than meaning.”

He had achieved economic success but not spiritual significance.

He had for too long pursued goals unworthy of his life.

I remember the very successful advertising executive Gerry Mander writing years ago that he woke up one morning, late in his career, and realized that he really didn't care if more people ate Quaker Oats than ate Malt-O-Meal.

Busyness alone, especially in middle adulthood, can keep us from giving thought to what we really want to do with our lives, what we want to live for, but sooner or later the kids leave home or life takes on a sameness that causes us to sit up and ask some hard questions about **what** we are doing and **why** we are doing it.

We tend to ask these hard questions most often at three or four critical times of life:

- I see them asked first in later adolescence and young adulthood – as plans are being made for education and career.
- I see them asked next after settling into a career and for some women after their children are all finally in school – it’s the beginning of the period for the so-called “mid-life crisis”.
- I see it again when the nest is finally empty or at the time of retirement – especially early retirement.
- There is one other circumstance that seems to call forth this kind of questioning of life’s purposes – it is when a major health crisis or relationship crisis occurs – death or divorce.

What about you – does your life matter?

If you were going to evaluate it and set or reset your course, how would you do that?

- Young man or woman – what will you trade your life for?
- Older man or woman – what will you give the rest of your life to?

Over the last three weeks I have spoken of God’s purpose in the world today.

I have demonstrated from the Scriptures that **God’s** purpose in the world is to restore his creation, to transform humanity to make it possible for us to live in relationship with a sovereign, holy, and loving God forever.

And the church is God’s appointed instrument for restoring humanity to that place of right relationship with God.

And **more** to the point, **we are individually** and collectively God’s appointed means to accomplish that purpose.

And now **most** to the point, is that what we have given **our** lives to?

Jesus, at 12 years of age asked his parents why they were surprised to find him in the Temple saying, “Didn’t you know that I would be doing my Father’s business?”

The Father has given us a calling, a vocation, a work to do.

? Is it the business of our lives?
Is it what we live for?

I began today by saying no matter how old we are most of us want our lives to count for something – we want to know that our lives matter.

In light of that desire and in light of God's purpose for us in the world it is fitting that we should begin a series of sermons in the book of Joshua today.

In the book of Joshua we find a group of people embarking on a mission – a mission to fulfill God's purpose for them.

But as the story begins we find them at the same place as some of us – whether they will respond to the mission or not – whether they will give their lives to God's business in the world or only to their own.

At the beginning of the story we find that a worthwhile life is dependent on two things – what we are trying to accomplish and who you trust in the process of accomplishing it.

Our lives are worthwhile when we have adopted God's mission for us and when we are trusting in God to accomplish that mission.

Since we want our lives to be worthwhile, listen and watch carefully as God, through the life of Joshua and the people of Israel, shows us how.

READ Joshua 1:1-18

I think it is helpful to review the historical and geographical context of this story.

Roughly 500 years earlier than Joshua God had led Abraham out of Chaldea (present day southern Iraq) and eventually led him into Canaan (present day Israel). (From the lower right hand corner of the map near the Persian Gulf to the left center of the map at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea.)

God promised Abraham that one day the land of Canaan would belong to his descendants.

But God said, first Abraham's descendants would live in Egypt before returning to Canaan – "The Promised Land".

Genesis 15:13-14 "Then the LORD said to him (Abraham), "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions."

That did in fact happen.

Abraham's great-grandson Joseph was sold into slavery to an Egyptian and when he subsequently became Prime Minister of the country, Joseph's entire family moved there because of a famine in Canaan.

Sometime after Joseph died a new king (called a Pharaoh in Egypt) became so fearful of the number of Israelites (the name given to Abraham's descendants) that he enslaved them all.

That is how the book of Genesis ends.

The book of Exodus begins roughly 380 years later with Moses being commissioned by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and back to the "Promised Land" of Canaan – just as God had promised.

The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy tell the story of getting from Egypt to the threshold of the Promised Land.

It took 40 years because of the faithlessness of the Israelites but when our story in Joshua 1 opens, the people, now under Joshua's leadership because Moses has died, are supposed to finally enter the "Promised Land."

It's hard to get a mental picture of what that scene must have looked like.

They were over a million people, along with their herds of cattle, living in tents encamped on land that looked much like eastern Utah – inhospitable.

I have been there and there is no reason to think it is much different today than what it was then.

The Israelite people were made up of the descendants of the 12 sons of Abraham's grandson who was named Israel and thus the name Israelites.

The descendants of those 12 sons were called tribes and each tribe was named after their particular forebear.

So in verse 12 of today's text when it speaks of the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, it is referring to the descendants of three of those sons – roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ of the entire group.

When the Israelites marched up the east side of the Dead Sea and finally reached a point east of the Jordan River due east of the city of Jericho, they stopped.

In the process of getting there they invaded that area and had to drive out the native inhabitants and take over their land, houses and cities. (Those battles are described in Deuteronomy)

When Moses was still alive, he had assigned that land, east of the Jordan, to be the land that those three tribes, at their request, would live in.

Those three tribes had their land.

They were ready to settle down, move into the cities, and raise their cattle and live life.

But while they were in a part of the land that had been promised to Israel by God, the heart of the “Promised Land” was west of the Jordan.

And as they looked across the Jordan River they did not see vacant land, which they could simply move on to like settlers and squatters in the American West of the 1800s.

They saw villages, towns and cities, fortified cities, cities that were part of alliances that had armies.

Here were these nomad Israelites with their tents, families and herds looking at invading a settled, fortified, and strongly defended land.

There must have been strong temptation to find an alternative.

That temptation must have been particularly strong for Joshua himself and for the two and ½ tribes who already had what they wanted.

But they had not yet accomplished the mission.

They were not done with what God had called them to do.
God told them to take the land – all of it.

Listen again to God’s command to Joshua and the Israelites:

Joshua 1:2,6,9 “Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them--to the Israelites... "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them... for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

I believe it is very intentional that Jesus’ command to us is given in similar language.

Matthew 28:19-20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Has the goal been accomplished?

Is the work done?

Like the 2 ½ tribes of Israel, we are tempted to settle down now that our “land” is secured.

Our lives are safe, our destiny is secure, our kids are saved or at least on the way to being saved.

We have our homes, our church, and our community of friends.

We can settle down and just enjoy life – somebody else can take care of the other side of the Jordan.

But that is not God’s call to us.

That is not the mission he has given us.

That is not a life worth living.

Last week I quoted Eugene Peterson saying, “If I am not reminded of the foundational realities with which we are dealing – God, kingdom, and gospel – I am going to end up living a futile, fantasy life.”

(Peterson [The Contemplative Pastor](#))

Life is worthwhile when we are living out God’s mission for us and we are trusting in God to accomplish it.

What are you living for? Is it worthwhile?

You might say, but I have to make a living, not everybody is a missionary.

I’m reminded of a story Larry Graber and others love to repeat:

Two men were working and one was asked what he was doing and he said he was making bricks. Another man **doing exactly the same work** was asked what he was doing and he said he was building a cathedral.

You may sell shoes to earn an income but that is not your calling in life.

You may be an attorney or an engineer but that is not your calling in life.

You are called to make disciples in all the earth, to help people become faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

You aren’t making bricks you’re building a cathedral.

Parents, you're not just raising children – you're raising Christ-followers.

Employees, you're not just a salesperson or a technician or whatever your vocation is, you are a spiritual beachhead into the lives of fellow-employees and customers.

Don't settle for just earning so much money or building a business, or making a name for yourself, or getting a certain degree.

Your calling in life is much greater than that.

Your life is worthwhile because you are integral to the fulfillment of God's plan for his world.

Don't settle for less.

Again, life is worthwhile when we are living out God's mission for us and we are trusting in God to accomplish it.

It's one thing to get the mission straight in our heads but it's another thing to live it.

Even if we are committed to the mission there immediately arises the fear that we can't do it.

I believe that thousands of Christians, some of us, have gotten sidetracked from the worthwhile mission of making disciples, not because we didn't at some time **want** to give ourselves to it but because we gave up.

Defeatism, skepticism and even cynicism dog the Christian experience.

We look at a world of fortified cities and we too quickly assume they can't be conquered.

We hear of winning the world for Christ but secretly wonder if we will make it ourselves.

We go to church and hear encouraging stories of new converts and evangelizing a neighborhood or country but then we hit the streets on Monday and feel like an overwhelmed minority.

I can read Jesus announcement in the Gospels how the Kingdom of God will fill the earth.

I can think of the Great Commission and imagine a world overtaken by the Gospel.

But then I think of the over 4000 years of human history since God said the world would be blessed through Abraham, I think of the nearly 2000 years since Jesus said to take the gospel into the whole world and I see a world increasingly dominated by secularism and I wonder what's the use.

The great temptation is to hunker down, cope as best we can, ride out the storm of life, hope for heaven, and yield the land to the enemy.

The Israelites didn't stand a chance against the fortified cities and armies of Canaan except for one thing – God.

The mission that God has given to us individually and collectively will not be accomplished on our own, no matter how charismatic the personality, how much money is thrown at it, and how clever the plan.

To Joshua God makes it very clear that a worthwhile life is lived by trusting God.

Look at Joshua 1:5-9 again: "No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

“Joshua, in order to fulfill your mission in life, in order to have a life worth living, you will experience my presence and provision every step of the way.”

There are at least **two dimensions to this issue of trust**: Those two dimensions are **confidence** and **conduct**.

Confidence in God and the conduct of obedience.

I want to talk first of all about confidence in God.

Confidence in God is based on three things: His promise, His Presence and His past performance.

What was God’s **promise** to the Israelites?

- Verse 2 I am going to give this land to you.
- Verse 3 I will give you every place where you set your foot.
- Verse 5 No one will be able to stand up against you.
- Verse 6 You **will** lead these people to inherit the land.

The outcome was promised.

No matter how long it took and no matter how many casualties were sustained the outcome was guaranteed – God promised.

Joshua you can’t fail because God **won’t fail**.

God has given **us** a mission that can’t fail because **he won’t**.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:14 “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Jesus said in Luke 13:18-21 “Then Jesus asked... What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

At then finally in Revelation 11:15 "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

If your life's work (not necessarily how you earn your income), if your life's work is to help people become faithful followers of Jesus Christ – to help people become part of the Kingdom of God, you can't fail because God won't.

Not only is the confidence of trust built on his promise but on his presence:

- Verse 5 I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.
- Verse 9 The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

That is the promise of Jesus to us that many of us ignore – And ignoring it is not so much a sin as it is sad.

How many times, especially in crisis, do we act like we are alone.

Oh, to acknowledge the presence of Jesus with us in every situation – we can't fail in the mission because he won't let us.

The confidence of trust results not only from God's promise and presence but also from God's past performance.

Joshua 1:5 “No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you...”

Joshua knew the history of God's faithfulness to his people.

He had heard how God had steadfastly worked in Abraham's, Isaac's, Jacob's and Joseph's lives.

He had heard the stories over and over again of God's protection, God's provision and God's power on behalf of his people.

As a very young man he had witnessed the miracles of the plagues in Egypt, the saving of the first-born Israelites from the angel of death, the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, and the manna from the skies.

God had proven himself faithful.

Those stories and countless others like them are our stories too.

Yes you can be cynical and say that the good things of life are just coincidental.

But if you believe in God and believe that he sent his Son Jesus for us, then it is illogical not to accept that “every good and perfect gift is from above” as James said it, and not to take courage that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joshua is the same God who is faithful to me today.

Trust in God is not only confidence in the promises, presence and past performance of God.

Trust in God also includes conduct.

All of us know that you can say you trust in someone but if you don't act on that trust, your statement doesn't mean anything.

Real trust includes action – God says if you trust me you will obey me.

To Joshua God said in Joshua 1:7-8 “Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

God says if you are going to live a worthwhile life, if you are going to accomplish the mission I have given you then this is what you must do – know and obey my Word.

God was reminding Joshua of the foundational strategy of living a worthwhile life – live an intimate relationship with God in his Word.

I find it interesting, as one author put it, that God doesn't give Joshua military instructions at this point.

Wouldn't that have been what you would have wanted?

God give me the military intelligence I need on the armies we must fight, give me the battle plan, give me the names of the men I should put in charge.

But God says if you want success in your mission, here is what I am telling you to do – meditate on my Word so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.

When defining the Word, the “Law” as God calls it here, we too often think quickly and only of the myriad of specific laws about diet, ceremony and morals.

But we must understand that the “law” was the term used to encompass the entirety of the first five books of the Bible.

As such “the law” means all that God is teaching in those books.

Those books demonstrate God’s will and way with his people – they are the story of a faithful God, one worthy of trusting and obeying.

So when God say to “be careful to do everything written in it”, Joshua is not being asked simply to brush his teeth twice a day and sacrifice a certain number of animals on special occasions.

But he is being asked to know so well how God has acted in the past that he completely trusts and faithfully follows that same God.

So central is this intimate relationship with God in his Word that earlier God through Moses said this:

Deuteronomy 17:18-20 “he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left.

We must not treat the Word of God as a recipe or roadmap but we must have such an intimate relationship with God in his Word that that Word of God informs or influences every decision of life.

You see, the key to a worthwhile life is not logistical but spiritual.

Are you a man or woman of the Word, one in whom the Word of God influences every part of life?

If my life were more fully given to accomplishing God's mission in the world, how would my life change?

Would it affect my praying?

Would it affect my time in God's Word?

Would it affect my use of money?

Would it impact what I think about and plan for?

A life is worthwhile when we have adopted God's mission for us and we are trusting in God to accomplish it.