

Joshua Chapter 3 the Two Watchwords of Victory

by A.B. Simpson

The two watchwords of victory are faith and obedience, which are interwoven in the story of Joshua and essential for a sanctified life.

Scripture: Joshua 1:1

Topics: "Faith", "Obedience"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the dual principles of Faith and Obedience as essential for a victorious Christian life, drawing from the experiences of the Israelites in Joshua. He illustrates how faith is active and present, urging believers to step out in trust, while obedience requires diligence and unwavering commitment to God's commands. The sermon highlights that true faith leads to action, and that obedience must be both intelligent and inflexible, warning against the dangers of compromise. Simpson uses biblical examples, such as the fall of Jericho and the defeat at Ai, to demonstrate the consequences of faith and obedience in the believer's journey. Ultimately, he calls for a harmonious relationship between faith and obedience to fully experience God's promises.

Transcript

Joshua 1: 1-9.

Like the two wings of a bird, like the two oars of a boat, both essential to its proper movement, are the two principles of Faith and Obedience, which are ever linked together in a rightly regulated Christian life, and which are interwoven in the opening scenes of the Book of Joshua. Let us look at them separately and then jointly.

THE WATCHWORD OF FAITH

The land of promise was won by faith. Every step was a step of faith; the Jordan was crossed by faith; by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed seven days; by faith Rahab was saved, and perished not with them who believed not. By faith every victory was achieved in their onward progress until at last Caleb had claimed the heights of Hebron, and Joshua had reached his inheritance at Timnath-Serah. Here we have some of the features of faith most strongly emphasized.

PRESENT TENSE

1. We have the present tense of faith: "The land which I do give to them, even the children of Israel." (Josh. 1:2.) God here speaks in the immediate present. It is not something He is going to do, but something He does do, this moment. So faith ever speaks. So God ever gives. So He is meeting you today, in the present moment.

This is the test of faith. So long as you are waiting for a thing, hoping for it, looking for it, you are not believing. It may be hope, it may be earnest desire, but it is not faith; for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

God meets us first in the future tense, as He did Abraham: "I will make My covenant between Me and you." (Gen. 17:2.) But He brings us immediately, if we are willing, into the present tense; so we read, "My covenant is with you." (Gen. 17: 4.)

There must come a moment in your life when you really receive Christ as your Saviour, and in that moment you are saved. There must come a crisis-hour when you yield yourself to Him, and take Him as your Sanctifier, and from that moment you are sanctified.

The command in regard to believing prayer is in the present tense. "When you pray, believe that you receive the things that you desire, and you shall have them." Have we come to that moment? Have we met God in His everlasting Now?

PERFECT TENSE

2. We have next the perfect tense of faith. We see this in the third verse: "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given you." The present has now become the perfect tense. That which but a moment ago was the present is now the perfect tense. And so in Genesis 17: 5, we find the present tense passing into the perfect and God saying: "A father of many nations have I made you." This is perfectly consistent. God cannot repeat Himself, or allow His words to be of no effect. When He speaks it is done; when He commands, it stands fast. And He is pleased to have us recognize His work as perfect, and His word as everlasting, and step out upon it in unflinching confidence.

So we find Him speaking in His own Word, of Jesus as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," although it was not actually fulfilled until the world was 4,000 years old; but His purpose and His promise were counted fulfilled, and God speaks in the language of faith and certainty.

IMPERATIVE MOOD

3. We have the imperative mood of faith in Genesis 17: 9: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be you dismayed." This is the faith that falters not, fears not, refuses to be dismayed, and with defiant courage goes forth and faces every foe. It says, with Isaiah: "The Lord God will help me; therefore I shall not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." And with Paul: "None of these things move me." "In nothing shall I be ashamed; but always Christ shall be magnified in my body." "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day "

Our faith must not only be real, but it must be strong; sometimes it must be audacious. The faintest fear will paralyze it. A quiver in that regimental line will bring disaster and defeat to the whole army. There must

be unfaltering steadiness and bold defiance throughout. Unbelief always begins in little doubts and fears, and God reiterates the command, "Fear not, fear not, fear not." "Be careful for nothing." "Take no anxious thought for the morrow." Not with the fiery artillery of hell is our faith first assaulted, but by an army of little moths, with their soft touch and velvet wings; and soon our spiritual garment is riddled and ruined before the real fight begins. If we would win in the conflict of faith, we must stand without fear, unfaltering and unmoved, and resist in the imperative mood of victorious confidence.

ACTIVE VOICE

4. The active voice of faith.

True faith expresses itself in action. It reaches the soles of our feet, and steps out in actual movements that prove its reality and sincerity. We read of "the steps of our father Abraham." Faith has stepping stones. So their faith expressed itself; first, in their stepping into the waters of the Jordan, and next in their circuit of Jericho for seven days.

Their faith was not only active, but persistent. They continued to go through the whole testing until it was thoroughly proved and finally triumphant. So our faith must ever step out and claim its blessing until it fully receives it. It was as the lepers went, that they were healed. Had they lingered pleading at the feet of Jesus, they never would have been healed; but when they moved forward in obedience to the Master's command, they found His promise awaiting them as they advanced.

It was as Naaman stepped into the Jordan at the command of Elisha, that his healing came. But he had to do it more than once; seven times had he to persevere until his faith was fully proved, and then the answer came. It is in the midst of the proving that faith often breaks down. It is easy to take one bold step, but a patient continuance in the work of faith tries the inmost soul.

Their faith had not only to encompass Jericho seven days, but on the seventh day it had to rise to a height to which it had not before attained, and with sevenfold patience and perseverance complete the circuit over and over again until the trial was complete, and the shout of victory came at last.

It must have been very hard. To their own rational sense it must have seemed strange and to the people of Jericho, no doubt, it looked contemptible. One can see them gathering on the walls, as, day after day, the procession was resumed, until at last it became ridiculous; and doubtless on the seventh day the circuit was scarcely noticed. But on and on those faithful soldiers marched, until at last, their movements became accelerated, and quicker and quicker their footsteps repeated that course until, as the sun went down, the last round was finished, the trumpets gave the signal, the shouts of the people rent the heavens, and with a resounding crash, the walls of Jericho tumbled down before the assault of victorious faith.

Again, we see faith following up God's working, in the story of Jericho. In answer to their advance and their shout of faith, the walls of faith fell down, but this would have been unavailing if they had not at once followed up God's mighty working and marched in at the open gates. And so we read that "they went every man straight before him, and they took the city." So in our lives there is ever a place for the faith which recognizes God's mighty working and advances along the lines which He has prepared.

Once more we have an illustration of faith in the saving of Rahab. We learn that this glorious principle of action is not only for the higher stages of our Christian life, but that the vilest sinner may rise through it into

the place of pardon and salvation. Rahab was the vilest of the Canaanites, but that little scarlet thread which she hung from the walls of her house, that crimson sign of her trust in God and the word of His messengers, was sufficient to obliterate the stains of her whole life, and to place her in the very line of His redeemed, yes, among the very ancestors of Christ Himself.

This is the watchword by which we too must enter our land of promise. By the faith that believes and receives forgiveness and salvation, before we feel it, must we pass from condemnation into justification. By the faith that takes Christ as our sanctification and reckons ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, must we cross the Jordan and take our inheritance of full salvation. By faith must we receive the Holy Ghost and recognize His indwelling before we feel His touch; by faith must we overcome our enemies, and utter the shout of victory in the thickest of the fight; by faith we must receive the answers to our prayers and turn them into praises and thanksgivings, before we witness their fulfilment. "We that have believed do enter into rest." "Let us, therefore, fear, lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

Let us claim the faith that receives the promise in the present tense, that confesses it in the perfect tense; that triumphs in the imperative mood, and that conjugates it through all its moods and tenses, until it can write under every promise, "Tried and proved," and over every difficulty, "More than conquerors through Him that loved us."

THE WATCHWORD OF OBEDIENCE

This is just as emphatic as the other. "Only be you strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper whithersoever you go."

"This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; but you shall meditate therein day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then shall you have good success."

Here we have the various moods and tenses of obedience.

INTELLIGENT

1. It must be intelligent and diligent. "Observe to do." It is not merely the blundering and clumsy obedience of careless feet, but the earnest, thoughtful, watchful obedience of the whole mind and soul and heart. It takes pains to find out the will of God, as well as to do it; it heeds and hearkens, as well as runs to do His bidding. How often hearkening is emphasized in the Old Testament! "Obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." The obedient heart is one that listens for the whisper of His voice, watching daily at wisdom's door to know the heavenly message, and vigilantly observing that it make no mistake. Most of the failures and faults of our lives arise not from intent, but from culpable ignorance. We ought to have known better, and our ignorance will not excuse us. Therefore, a spirit of meditation upon God's law, and thorough familiarity with it, is required on the part of Joshua. Do we thus study our Bible? Do we meditate on its precepts day and night? Do we thus diligently compare our lives with His Word? Do we regulate our hearts, our homes, and our conversations according to His Word? Do we deal with our friends and our foes according to the very Word of God?

A sanctified life is a life conformed to the Scriptures in every particular. It commences with our hearts; it next reaches our ears, and then it is accomplished in our feet. First, we love the Lord our God with all our heart, next we hearken to His voice, and finally we walk in all His ways. Hence, in the anointing of the ancient priest, the thumb of the right hand was anointed as a symbol of the faith that takes God's promises; and the right ear and the right foot as an expression of the obedience that hearkens and follows.

We need a very attentive ear and a very watchful spirit, to escape being deceived, and to avoid missing the Master's perfect will. There is no more solemn instance in all the Old Testament than the story of the nameless prophet who came from Judah to Bethel, in the days of Jeroboam, and at God's command boldly denounced the idolatry of Israel's king and bore witness for Jehovah with magnificent fidelity, and at the risk of his life. Then he started home, but on his way, disobeyed Jehovah in a very small and apparently trifling thing. God had told him to go home without lingering on the way, and not to enter any man's house until he had left the accursed land. But on his way back, another prophet enticed him by telling him that he also was a prophet, and had received a word from the Lord, bidding him to tarry for a night at his house. He listened to the insidious temptation, went home with the false prophet, and the next day as he was pursuing his way home a lion met him on the way and devoured him because he had broken the command of his God.

God would thus emphasize the meaning of real obedience, and the way He regards the slightest deviation from His perfect law. And though He has, in His great longsuffering, often borne with many of us, none the less does He hate our negligence, and sometimes indifference; and none the less does real holiness and obedience involve such watchful and entire regard to His slightest word.

INVARIABLE

2. But our obedience must be invariable and inflexible -- "turn not to the right hand or to the left." There can be no compromise about it; it is as inflexible with respect to the least as to the greatest command. The highest test of the spirit of obedience is always given in some little thing. When God hung the testing of the human race upon a single act in the garden of Eden, it was not a great act, but a simple abstinence from a single indulgence, so slight as to be in itself unimportant; but for that very reason the greater test of the spirit of obedience. When a thing itself is insignificant we do it not for its own sake, or because of its intrinsic value, but because we have respect for the will of our Master. Therefore, in almost every case, the most fatal acts of disobedience are little compromises. A bold and daring act of wickedness compels us to recognize our awful position and carries with it a certain check; but a trifling compromise escapes the ordinary conscience, and leads on by imperceptible stages to the final and farthest degrees of disobedience and sin. Saul lost his kingdom, not by refusing to do what God commanded him, but by doing nearly all that he was sent to do, and simply compromising on one little detail. He went against Amalek, he took much trouble and underwent many sacrifices, perhaps risked his life in the campaign, defeated armies and destroyed cities, and thought he had done all that he had been told to do; but he simply put aside a little of the spoil for himself and received the awful rebuke, "Obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king."

David has emphasized in the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm this essential quality of true obedience in these great words: "I esteem all Your precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way."

And Jesus has put it into a still more emphatic sentence in His last words to His disciples: "You are My friends if you do whatsoever I command you."

TESTED AT AI

As the principle of faith was illustrated in the early incidents of the Book of Joshua, by the story of Jericho, so the principle of obedience is exemplified in the failure of Achan and the defeat of Israel at Ai.

Flushed with their first victory, Israel's hosts marched against Ai expecting an easy triumph. But they were surprised to find that their hosts were hurled back in defeat. Joshua threw himself on his face before the Lord, but God would not listen to his prayers, but commanded him immediately to arise and put away the sin which had brought dishonor to Israel and separated them from the presence and blessing of God. "Neither will I be with you any more," was the awful threatening, "unless you put away the accursed thing from among you." How solemn the lesson! how fearful the effect of a single sin!

But there was a remedy for their disobedience; the sin was to be acknowledged, brought into the light and put away forever; and then God said, in that wonderful message, "Fear not; see, I have given into your hands the king of Ai and his people and his city and his land."

REMEDY FOR DISOBEDIENCE

Is there a remedy for the disobedience of the sanctified Christian? Yes! surely God is not less merciful to His dear children than He is to the ungodly world, and it is graciously true of us, His people, that "if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The way is very simple: confess; call the evil by its right name; recognize it in God's light; do not excuse or palliate it, or call it by some complimentary term, but bring it out into the full light of God's holiness and forever abandon it as an accursed thing, and the blood of Jesus will not only expiate it but will wash away the stain and cleanse you from all unrighteousness, restoring you to more than your former place in God's fellowship and favor.

We have a still further illustration in this book of Joshua of the true spirit of obedience in the incident related in the ninth chapter, with respect to the Gibeonites. It will be remembered that these men came in disguise pretending that they were pilgrims from a far country, and by their wiles they inveigled Joshua into a treaty with them which became a permanent snare. This illustrates the spirit of watchful obedience and hearkening to God, and the necessity of constant vigilance, if we would know His perfect will and not be deceived by the wiles of the adversary.

And so these two words -- Faith and Obedience -- are interwoven with the story of the first Canaan, even as they are inseparable from any true experience of our higher spiritual inheritance. Indeed, faith and obedience are the reverse sides of the same shield. When Abraham's faith is spoken of in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is called obedience. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out to the place that he should have received as an inheritance, obeyed." And indeed, the old Saxon word "believe" is just a combination of the two words -- "live" and "by." To believe is to "live by" the thing you believe; that is, to translate it into your daily life and conduct. Hence the Apostle speaks of those who "having put away a good conscience, have made shipwreck of their faith." You cannot obey rightly without a true faith, and you cannot keep a true faith if you cease to obey. Let us join together the wings of faith and obedience, and so mount up into the heavenly places and press our glorious way into the heights of grace and glory.

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