

“A Hopeful 2009”

Joshua 1:1-9

¹ After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. 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. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. 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; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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." (NIV)

What kind of a year was 2008 for you? Probably it was a combination of joys and sorrows, trials and victories, tears and I hope laughter as well. How have you been handling the last few months of the year and the TV and newspaper's continuing gloomy headlines for the coming year?

We are hearing more and more about businesses closing and people being laid off, people losing homes or fear of losing a home, rapidly dwindling personal savings and retirement investments, uncertainty in the global financial markets and how that will affect us. And then the personal and family issues that flow from all of this as well as just generally things that are part of living as a family, as a person.

As a result, anxiety, fear, and insecurity about the future become the norm for our society and culture. Even within the evangelical Christian community, the reality of our country's serious situation can result in a wonderment about God's provision for His people in light of all that could happen down the road in our family, in my life, in our country – whatever. Whether it be economic, financial, health, or family relationships: How are we Christians to react to these challenges that we will face this coming year?

If you are one who is concerned about what the future holds and are anxious about your life and personal circumstances, then I want to encourage you this morning with some very good news! I want to share with you some biblical truths that I hope will ensure you a hopeful 2009. And not just for this coming twelve months, but for subsequent new years and the rest of your lives as well.

In this portion of the Old Testament that is our text for today, God speaks to Joshua and gives him very vital words of encouragement and hope as this man takes over leadership of the children of Israel as they prepare to enter the Promised Land, certainly an unknown for many of what lay ahead. I believe the words of God to Joshua at this critical point in his life are applicable to us today as we prepare for our unknown journey as we move into this new year, 2009.

I want to share with you this concept, this truth that: Christians can have true hope and victory over worry and fear when they trust in God's perfect love, His providential presence in the person of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Flowing from a practical living out of this truth is something very wonderful, a wonderful reality that when the world sees such believing faith in us as God's people, they take note and by God's saving grace they come to a saving knowledge of Him, and renewed hope for themselves that they certainly do not have separate from their relationship with Him.

So, first of all we see in this text a powerful promise of Almighty God: God never leaves his people. We find that in a couple places here in verse 5 and verse 9. We see where it says in this section,

⁵ . . . As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. (NIV)

And then also in verse 9,

⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged . . . (NIV)

This is an awesome promise! In some ways it is hard to comprehend. Our Heavenly Father, God Almighty, the Creator of all the universe, sustainer of all of life makes a promise to His children that He will never, ever leave or abandon or forsake them. He promises to be with His children wherever they go. One knows he or she is one of His children when a person has saving faith and trust in His son Jesus Christ! Remember, God had been with Moses and the Hebrew people as He brought them out of Egypt

and sustained them and protected them in the wilderness for forty years: guiding them, feeding them, providing water and shelter for them, giving them victory over their enemies. This same, all-powerful, mighty God promises to be with you also!

We know this because of Who Jesus is and what He said about Himself and what He promised. Jesus declared, "If you see me, you see the Father for the Father and I are one." The Apostle Paul wrote, "The fullness of the deity resides in Jesus." See, Jesus was truly the Infinite God-Man, the Incarnation of God. He is the One whose birthday we celebrated two weeks ago. On one occasion Jesus declared, "The Holy Spirit will be in you, will live in you, and you will realize that I am in the Father, you are in me and I am in you!" Consequently Paul could declare with great fervor and boldness, "It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me!" And Jesus' last words to His disciples echoed the Words of God to Joshua, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The Christian, the one who trusts in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, has the Holy Spirit residing in him or her as He (the Holy Spirit) confirms the presence and the continual abiding presence of God Almighty in that person. Therefore, the power and love available to Joshua as he took the Hebrews into the Promised Land is also available to you as you face the trials, tribulations, the challenges, and just your normal life issues in this coming year.

Because of this wonderful promise of God's personal presence with us, then Christians can face each day with confidence. We can see in some of the verses here like in verse 6 he says,

⁶ *"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them."*

And then in verse 7,

⁷ *Be strong and very courageous . . .*

and also in verse 9,

⁹ *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged . . ." (NIV)*

With access to such Almighty power and the love and concern of your Heavenly Father telling you all of this about what He will do for you in every life situation, then, we must be courageous. We must be strong. We must prevail against the tide with confidence and have an overcomer-type of an approach to these things that come into your life. Be strong: be persistent and persevering in the challenges of life. Don't give up, don't let the trials, difficulties of life get the best of you!

You see, Christians are to have a positive attitude. Not in the world's sense of "positive thinking" whereby just thinking and self-willing it we can do something or cause us in our own human strength to be courageous. Rather it is the positive trusting in God's Word and drawing from that supernatural power that comes to us as we live our life on this earth. You see, Christians are not to be afraid to risk and experience life and all the challenges that life has for them. Christians are to learn to not panic when crises come and not to be afraid when life takes an unexpected turn one way or the other because our holy God is sovereignly and providentially involved in every aspect of your life from beginning to end. As hard as problems are, as hard as the challenge is, God has allowed that for you so that in the process of doing what He's called you to do in those circumstances you become conformed to the image of Christ more, which we all desire to mature in the faith. But it also enables us to be prepared for what He not only knows is coming, but has prepared you for so that when it comes you are ready for it whether it's an even greater crisis, whether it's an opportunity for service, ministry, or a moment to stand firm in faith against great odds. It's all His purpose to prepare you for what He has called you for as you live on this earth.

So, remember God is sovereign Lord! He is in control of all things whatsoever that occur in your life. Everything. Nothing, nothing is impossible with almighty God! The apostle Paul said, "All things do work for good to all who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose." He also said this, "I can do all things (not some things) through Christ who strengthens me!" No problem, no challenge, no difficulty is too great for our Lord Jesus Christ to enable you to persevere through by the power of the Holy Spirit.

David expresses this truth so well in Psalm 138 when he writes this,

³ *When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted.*

⁷ *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me. (NIV)*

This command, “to be strong and courageous, to not be terrified or discouraged,” this command to trust solely in God Almighty, is not restricted to just those times and situations that you have been pondering and anxious about for weeks, months, or even years. It is for every time, at every time, at those vulnerable times when you are prone to having fear and anxiety overcome you. It’s a natural reaction, not a sin. But you’re not to sin in that natural reaction. But I pray that God will bring to your remembrance in that time the reality and truth of His powerful, compassionate love and the totality of His presence in your life and in that moment. It is in those moments when this promise, this command from the Lord God Himself to you is so precious and real. He says, “Be strong and courageous, Tom. I will never leave you or forsake you, Tom!” Remember. It’s a growing experience, I will tell you that. You may not walk right out of here and be strong and courageous but you’re going to see as I move along here, there are ways that are going to help you become by God’s grace such a child of His.

As each of you believes this truth about God and acts on it in trusting faith, then you will experience courage and perseverance and strength in times of crisis that will truly be supernatural. It will not be because you can look back and say, “Well, I did pretty good in that situation. I’m getting pretty good.” No, you’ll be recognizing that in the midst of the most difficult, impossible situation God Almighty moved supernaturally in that situation. In that moment, the Word of God, which is so exciting, my friends, and brothers and sisters, is no longer just intellectual understanding about the wonderful things in the Bible, but it is real and powerful and spiritually transformational in that moment. An “aha” moment of great implication. That transformation will truly give you a growing and a continuing victory over the debilitating and negative influence of fear and anxiety which Satan, the enemy of our souls, so persistently wants to attack us with.

You see, Satan’s greatest objective is to apply his evil devices in your life, in your circumstance, to reduce your trust in God’s Word and His power, and to steal away the victory God has promised to you as His precious child. That’s the spiritual warfare that every one of us in this room who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, wanting to follow God, face. I’m afraid, my friends, until the Lord comes or He calls you home it will never end. It will never end. That’s why this is so important. We’re not just for this moment but really as a focus for the year ahead. Knowing you have this supernatural power of God available for you to rest on, then certainly if this is true, and I think you know it is, then you certainly should be able with renewed confidence, face with courage and confidence whatever 2009 has in store. This renewed confidence in God’s protective love and supernatural power enables you to experience the reality then of true hope, no matter what your life circumstances may be.

To ensure that you will be strong and courageous and that you will experience the powerful presence of the Lord in all of His fullness, then the next thing we need to know is that obedience to God’s Word is essential for spiritual strength and this renewed hope. Let’s see what God says to the people of Israel. He says,

⁷ . . . *Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, . . .*

⁸ *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 . . . (NIV)*

In this text, God is referring to His written Word, His inspired, inerrant Word given to Moses, the first five books in the Old Testament, the Torah, the Book of Law. For us today, that refers of course as we bring it to our time, the entire Bible: The Old and New Testaments, the full and complete counsel of God, all of God’s commands, all of God’s Word.

I want to make very clear that salvation is based solely on believing faith in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross for the full payment of all of your sins. In other words, no works of any sort are necessary for you to be saved, to have that relationship with God, your sins totally forgiven, and for you to be assured eternal life with Him at your death. That is true. I believe that, you all believe that. At the same time, He has put conditions on your and my experiencing the fullness of His presence and power in our lives as we live here on earth.

We see in these words of God to Joshua and to us today that God requires obedience to His Word. He requires that you not add or detract from that inspired Holy Word. He requires that you meditate on it day and night. He requires that you live it out in your life, being very careful to do all its commands.

Why is this so important to God? Because it is through the Word, the Bible, that God specifically reveals Himself and describes Himself to us. You’re not going to get very familiar with Who He is and how to really relate with Him as your Heavenly Father unless you really spend time in His word where He reveals Himself. It is through the Bible as the Holy Spirit illumines your mind and heart that you confront the person of Jesus Christ and the Good News of eternal salvation. It’s very interesting when you first become a Christian; there’s great enthusiasm and great joy in your life and family’s life and all of our lives when we hear that that has happened. But for us, frankly, who have moved along in our Christian walk, not in a judgmental way, but your joy, your faith in Christ is about this big [holding thumb about one inch from forefinger]. It is only as you do these things that God talks about that you mature as your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and God grows and grows and grows. That’s what He wants: to have you so trust in Him through all of your life experience, to just love Him with all of your heart, and you can only love Him by knowing

Him well. It is through your study of the Bible that you learn God's principles for living life to the fullest and in a manner that honors and glorifies Him. It is through concentrated, consistent study of the Bible that you receive wisdom, discernment, encouragement, and hope. Hope and God's wonderful all-encompassing peace.

My friends, if you want supernatural, spiritual strength, I urge you, I appeal to you, be studying regularly the Word of God. Meditate on it, ponder it, and apply it to your lives, because I'll tell you a little secret. There are times when a pastor who deals with people and interactions, even the scriptures, can become pretty self-centered about, "Well, we know this. We know that, and this and that." When we start becoming too prideful, thinking that we've really got it put together and, "Boy, we've got some pretty good gifts here, doing some pretty good stuff," then (it's very interesting and I've experienced the reality) the joy of the ministry disappears and the anguish and the frustration of people's problems become more personal. But you see, when I go back into the Word other than just preparing for a sermon and really do what I've just told you to do, things change. God is so forgiving. He's so loving, oh my goodness! He just says, "Oh, my, Tom, I'm so glad you're back here really getting to know Me again rather than just going out walking on your own laurels and your own abilities or whatever." So, let us commit then as a people to be make a deeper study of God's Word a priority for our lives and our family's lives in 2009.

Then finally this morning, realize the wonderful truth that when a person obeys God and rests in His promises then God guarantees a richness of blessings. We find that He says,

³ *I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.*

⁵ *No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. . .*

⁸ *. . . Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

⁹ *. . . for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (NIV)*

What glorious promises of our Heavenly Father! God Almighty guarantees you will prosper. Be strong, it means, be efficient, be of value, be successful. Now, it includes material blessings. We rejoice when God blesses us. Our culture is particularly blessed. In fact, it gets us in trouble sometimes, we've discovered. We're blessed that way, but more, separately from all of that, more importantly it is the blessing of a rich spiritual, emotional, "total being blessings" in the midst of all of life's circumstances! It's the reason that people who were the great martyrs of the church had this understanding. Brothers and sisters today around the world who are being persecuted are coming to know what this means, in prison, in jails, being persecuted.

You will also succeed. You will have spiritual insight as you follow God's direction. You will also have good understanding. You will be prudent, you will have wisdom from God and inner fortitude and integrity which, my friends, as we read the news, is less and less in our culture. We've become an anomaly if we live these things out. Your life will be full, rich, and a real blessing. Fear and anxiety will not control or dictate how you act or react to a challenge of life. Every difficult situation, personally or as a family, will be an opportunity (and this is so exciting) for spiritually transformational growth! Everything that you are going to encounter this year, as drastic and horrendously hard that you could even comprehend, God will use to transform you spiritually into something very amazing. That will be a hard place because you might never know why. Job didn't know why he lost everything, but you've got to trust God that He is faithful to His Word.

You will come to trust Almighty God more and more through every growing experience. God's providential love working through Jesus Christ who indwells you and the person and power of the Holy Spirit will enable you to truly experience in the midst of whatever it is, an attitude of positive hope. The apostle Paul writing his letter to Timothy said that Christ Jesus is our hope, and that's the center. Tommy mentions it, I mention it, and you understand it more and more. He is our hope.

You may have come here today really fearful of what the new year holds for your life. Based on the promises of God Himself to you, I urge you then, and I challenge you to resolve this very moment to have a mind and heart attitude change. You can be guaranteed a hopeful 2009! Trust God, believe He will do for you what He promises to do. Study His word. Obey Him and rest in His mighty power as centered in a relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. And then in the midst of all of this, experience a truly hopeful 2009 and a fulfilling, God-honoring and glorifying life as you move along living for Him in this world.