

Our Faith-Building God

We are in a war. There's a spiritual battle going on right now behind the scenes of what our eyes can see. The devil prowls around, Peter says, like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. What he wants to devour, primary, is your faith. If he gets your faith, he wins. If you persevere in your faith, you win. Because this war is spiritual, attacks and opposition may take a variety of shapes, all with the same aim, destroy your faith. Get you to doubt God, doubt His gospel, and give up living for His glory. Comfort might do that or suffering might do that. Wealth might do that or poverty might do that. Could be in the form of overt heretical teaching, or in the form of subtle teachings that contradict Scripture. No matter where we are in our journey with Christ, and no matter what our temptations may be, we all need our faith strengthened.

This morning God wants to strengthen our faith as we hear from Him in His word. We don't strengthen our faith by gazing at faith, we strengthen our faith by gazing at the object of our faith. When we see God as glorious and the gospel as precious, faith is present. So the prayer is that as we move through Joshua 10, where we are going to see God beginning to dominate His enemies with increasing ease, confirming His power and word to the Israelites, that we too, because God is the same God yesterday, today, and forever, that our faith would be strengthened. There are two main sections here which give us two faith builders that we are going to look at. *Faith builder 1, the sure sign of God's victory. faith builder two, the swift spread of God's Kingdom.*

Let's pray.

16-27 Faith-builder #1: The sure sign of God's Victory

To give us some context here, because we are jumping down in the middle of this chapter, Joshua and the people of God have been advancing in the land that God has promised to give them. Joshua captures Ai and Gibeon makes peace with Israel. News travels to the king of Jerusalem, Adoni-zedek, who starts freakin out, and so he gathers together a team of five other kings to try to fight. Their plan is to first strike Gibeon. Gibeon calls Israel for help, Joshua marches through the night, surprises them, and kicks their tail as God rains down hailstones on them. It's a slaughter. And that's where we pick up in v.16...

v.16, "These five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah. And it was told to Joshua, "The five kings have been found, hidden in the cave at Makkedah." And Joshua said, "Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave and set men by it to guard them, but do not stay there yourselves. Pursue your enemies; attack their rear guard. Do not let them enter their cities, for the LORD your God has given them into your hand." When Joshua and the sons of Israel had finished striking them with a great blow until they were wiped out, and when the remnant that remained of them had entered into the fortified cities, then all the people returned safe to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah. Not a man moved his tongue against any of the people of Israel.

Then Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave and bring those five kings out to me from the cave." And they did so, and brought those five kings out to him from the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. And when they brought those kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the men of Israel and said to the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him, "Come near; put your feet on the necks of these kings." Then they came near and put their feet on their necks. And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight." And afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees. And they hung on the trees until evening. But at the time of the going down of the sun, Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves, and they set large stones against the mouth of the cave, which remain to this very day.

There's a few faith building points to look at as we make our way to the big point of God giving them a sure sign of victory.

1. Evil flees before God

These five kings, representing the armies of darkness, flee before God. It's no contest. The picture here is complete domination. Their hearts have melted. Their strength is dried up. Regardless of what they first thought, coming into contact with the Israelites, they now realize that fleeing is their only option. *It's intentional here, the same word flee is used in v.11 to describe the armies, and here it's describing the kings.* They runaway. When you compare forces, fighting is not an option.

When God shows up all evil and darkness have to go. It's not a contest for God. And we have wrong categories if we put God and evil in a boxing ring and we are going to let them duke it out. Those are not biblical categories. God is so far above Evil, they aren't on the same level. Evil comes from Satan who is a created being, right? Satan's life is, therefore, dependent upon God upholding him. He belongs to God. He's subservient to God's purposes.

This builds our faith because the world is not out of control. Is there unbelievable suffering and pain, yes, there is. And there could be unbelievable pain and suffering in your life this morning or someone you are near to. We don't understand all the why's of suffering and evil in this life, but the Bible tells us how to rightly think about it. Suffering and evil are not of God, but they are on His sovereign leash accomplishing His sovereign purposes. Those great purposes are His glory and our eternal joy. When God shows up, darkness flees.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:5

The first place God shines His light is in our hearts. He shines His light, the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, He shines Christ light into our wicked hearts, and evil flees. Why do you think you love God? Why did you believe in Christ? Because God showed up in your heart! He routed the enemy. That was not a contest for God. You might have felt the war and wrestled through it with your will, from God's vantage point, He shines the light in and darkness flees.

2. Evil will be exposed by God

So these kings are forced to flee, and they think they can hide. It's comical. You cannot hide from the all-seeing, ever present God of the universe. So its only a matter of time until they are found in the cave and exposed. The same is true evil that is in operation today. It is only a matter of time until it is exposed.

Hebrews 4:13, "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

All of us are impacted in different ways by evil, big or small. Certainly we look out on the horizon, and we can be tempted to think there's no accountability in the world. The wicked go on from bad to worse, and like the psalmist 73, it appears the wicked have the better life even. Wicked rulers, genocide, sex trafficking, crime of every kind on a mass scale. Psalm 73 says I was tempted to be envious of them until I discerned their end. They have an end.

Maybe its closer to home for you... where you have personally been sinned against. Persecution of some sort. Or abuse, physical, verbal, emotional. Someone slandered your reputation. They will be exposed before God. Evil does not operate outside of accountability, as much as we might feel that. The scriptures assume that we 'feel' like their unaccountable. How can they get away with it! we say. No, every wicked deed will be exposed. No one is getting away with anything.

Our responsibility, don't avenge. Let God avenge. Love them, do good to them. **“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” Romans 12:19**

But then we also have to consider the darkness in our own hearts. We aren't outside God's accountability. We will be exposed in the last day. We try to run from God in all kinds of ways, and we try to hide in just as many ways. We are very creative about how we try to hide from God. Adam and Eve jumped behind a tree and we've been jumping behind trees ever since.

We erect systems of thought that deny God. We throw ourselves into work or family. We fill our schedules up with as much noise and business as possible because we don't want to face Him. We hate being still before Him because it means being broken before Him. We fill our lives up with activity, maybe even ministry type activity, not realizing that we are running and hiding from God. God's trying to deal with our hearts, and we are unwilling to go there.

If you see patterns of avoiding His Word, avoiding prayer, and avoiding His people, and avoiding confession. Hiding is bound up in a sinner's attempt to avoid judgment! But maybe you are in His Word, but you blitz through it, checking off your reading plan, and not seeking to meet God or be transformed in that time. Oh yeah, you can hide from God while having your Bible open. The pharisees had their Bible's memorized.

We are kidding ourselves if we think we will not be exposed. We must all be sensitive to this tendency in us to hide. If we think we don't hide, we are probably hiding. What's foolish, is that if we come to God in Christ, there's no condemnation. We are falling into the trap of the enemy if we continue to hide. Coming into the light is where we experience forgiveness, peace, acceptance, reconciliation, and joy, and grow as disciples. Find a trusted brother and sister and share with them what's going on in your heart. We cannot hide, so let's stop kidding ourselves and let's come clean with God today.

Our great hope is not only on evil being exposed, but 3. that darkness will be conquered.

3. Evil will be conquered

The climax of this section, Joshua orders to bring the kings out.. V.24 “And when they brought those kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the men of Israel and said to the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him, “Come near; put your feet on the necks of these kings.” Then they came near and put their feet on their necks. And Joshua said to them, “Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight.”

This is an unbelievable scene here. 5 of the most powerful kings of the Amorites, all dragged out in front of Israel. Joshua makes an object lesson out of them. The kings lay down on their backs and the chiefs of Israel are ordered to lodge their feet right on their necks... that's the visual. Then the teaching and interpretation, *“Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For thus the Lord will do to all your enemies against whom you fight.”*

It's a symbol of military victory and conquest, the complete subjugation of their enemies. The teaching moment that Joshua delivers to the people is almost verbatim to the words that God gave Joshua in chapter 1. Joshua transfers the confidence and faith He has received from the Lord to the people. God will cause them to triumph over their enemies. Have no fear, just as these kings are being conquered, so all your other enemies will be conquered.

He then takes the kings and kills them, hangs them on trees, and stuffs them back into their caves. Their place of hiding was their prison and then their grave.

So how are we to see this sign? We are to see this sign pointing us to the greater sign of victory that was to come. Not through a conquering king, but through a suffering servant. This sign in Joshua 10 echoes Gen. 3:15, where its prophesied after the Fall, that Satan would be crushed under the heel of the Messiah, and the Messiah would have His heel bruised.

Palm 100:1 prophesies similarly about the coming King, “The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

This wasn't a battle against the Amorites, it was against Satan and all the powers of darkness. In the cross of Christ, God deals the decisive death blow to darkness. The sure sign of victory that we have is that Christ came out of the grave. The battle has been won. It's finished.

Are we still in it, yeah, we are, but glory is a certainty. As the Israelites looked at Joshua's men holding their heels against the kings, gaining confidence and trust for the future battles, so we look to Christ on the cross and His resurrection, and we know that He will see to it that every other enemy will be beaten down.

Eph. 1:22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

Jesus is high and lifted up, and the church is in Jesus body, and the evil powers have been put under His feet, and so under our feet. We are more than conquerors in Jesus Christ. We reign over evil. God will complete the work that He started in us. This is for us personally to know in our hearts and reassure ourselves of His grace and forgiveness, and this is for us missionally. We have been given a task to make disciples that make disciples. This is the sign that our work cannot be stopped, a. because its His power, and b. its already been won. One day the new heavens and new earth are coming.

Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. There was His first and decisive defeat in the cross, and there is coming his second and final defeat in the future.

God's wrath is coming to conquer sin and evil. We can choose to believe in the cross of Christ and have Christ take God's wrath for us, in our place, or we can choose, like these kings, to hide in our sin, which will ultimately lead to their judgment. After Joshua gives this sign, he has them killed, hung on trees, then thrown back into their cave. Their place of hiding became their prison and then their grave. That's what sin does.

But in Christ there is no condemnation. Let's not hide in our performance, but hide in the perfect righteousness of Christ.

28-43 Faith Builder #2: The swift spread of God's Kingdom

As for Makkedah, Joshua captured it on that day and struck it, and its king, with the edge of the sword. He devoted to destruction every person in it; he left none remaining. And he did to the king of Makkedah just as he had done to the king of Jericho.

Then Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Makkedah to Libnah and fought against Libnah. And the LORD gave it also and its king into the hand of Israel. And he struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it; he left none remaining in it. And he did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho.

Then Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Libnah to Lachish and laid siege to it and fought against it. And the LORD gave Lachish into the hand of Israel, and he captured it on the second day and struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it, as he had done to Libnah.

Then Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish. And Joshua struck him and his people, until he left none remaining.

Then Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Lachish to Eglon. And they laid siege to it and fought against it. And they captured it on that day, and struck it with the edge of the sword. And he devoted every person in it to destruction that day, as he had done to Lachish.

Then Joshua and all Israel with him went up from Eglon to Hebron. And they fought against it and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword, and its king and its towns, and every person in it. He left none remaining, as he had done to Eglon, and devoted it to destruction and every person in it.

Then Joshua and all Israel with him turned back to Debir and fought against it and he captured it with its king and all its towns. And they struck them with the edge of the sword and devoted to destruction every person in it; he left none remaining. Just as he had done to Hebron and to Libnah and its king, so he did to Debir and to its king.

So Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the LORD God of Israel commanded. And Joshua struck them from Kadesh-barnea as far as Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. And Joshua captured all these kings and their land *at one time*, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel. Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.

In the remainder of this chapter God makes good on His promise to Israel, and Joshua's Word of confidence to Israel comes to pass. The army moves south and conquers all the land in the southern portion of Canaan. The momentum picks up significantly here. If you've been tracking with us, each story and battle in Joshua has had a whole narrative around it, entire chapters devoted to it. Here the narrator is showing us something of the increasing domination of Israel. Each battle is given just a couple verses. 7 cities are mentioned here, perhaps the number, less as an exhaustive list, but to show the completion of conquest southward. One after another, the enemies go down. They don't all happen in the same way, but the end result is the same, summarized in v. 40 Joshua struck the whole land and devoted all to destruction.

Then we get an important marker of time at the end of this section. Joshua captured all these kinds and their land *at one time, or in one campaign*. It was a swift enforcement of their military dominance.

The swiftness and speed of the domination highlights the power and authority of God. The true reason behind the success is clearly given, "because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel." Success happened because God was behind the fighting. This is the constant refrain we've been hearing in the book of Joshua. You fought, but God gave the victory.

This was a serious faith-builder for the Israelite. They had seen some miracles, had been told God was going to drive out their enemies, and here they experience it, a breathtaking display of God's power, its actually happening. No one can stand in our way. Our God is for us and He fights for us!

It's like the good deposit guaranteeing the inheritance to come, right. God's going to keep doing this. He fights for His people. The same is true for us. We can think of this land in two ways. In our walks with Christ, on an internal front, God has overcome the evil in our hearts. When He came in, He dominated! As believers, some level of your heart is radically changed. We should praise God for that! Remember your testimony, what God has done in your life. It builds your faith to remember God's hand.

At the same time, there still remains a lot functional enemies in our hearts, its what we call the flesh, the old person that we still live with, that's opposed to God. We should have faith to fight and put those sins to death in the power of God. We must keep fighting, taking all of our hearts for God.

We can think of this not only internally, but externally, not just us as disciples, but in the task to make disciples. This text reminds us of the early church, that had about everything possible stacked against it. Intense persecution and cultural resistance. Pentecost is empowered, and explodes. Peter preaches a message and 3000 get saved. The Lord adds daily those who are being saved. Two chapters later another 5,000 in the

church. Acts 6, they multiplied greatly. by the year 300 its estimated 6 million, 10 percent of the roman empire was christian.

Throughout history God has moved in remarkable ways. Welch revival, the Great Awakenings. His work in the persecuted church in China. It's not just big movements though, every individual is a testimony to God's power and kingdom. Any time we see advance, it's faith building. There's over 2B identified christians in the world. The gospel has traveled to Cary NC. This strengthens our faith to see the gospel at work in the world.

We are called to see that just as the Israelites are called to take the whole land, so we are called to make disciples in all the world. The task is unfinished. That's what we are doing here. Go, Jesus says, into all the world and make disciples. We recognize God is at work, give thanks for it, and pursue more of God. Both internally, continuing to crucify our flesh, and externally bringing others into conformity to Christ.

This also points us to the new heavens and new earth when Jesus returns as a divine warrior and at that point the kingdom will come swiftly and finally.

In Joshua 10 this morning we have seen two faith-builders, the sure sign of God's victory and the swift spread of God's kingdom.

What God has done in the cross guarantees our victory. What He has done in history to spread the gospel increases our faith. He's not going to stop. Though the Scriptures command us to fill the world with the gospel, they also testify that not everyone will come into the kingdom. Just as Canaan was not the final resting place of Israel, so the earth is not our final resting place either.

God is coming back as a mighty warrior in Jesus and He will bring His wrath all those that do not submit. He will then usher us into the new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness and peace and glory will reign forever. Where there will be no internal or external enemies to God.

Our faith is strengthened as we gaze upon the object of our faith, on Jesus. Faith isn't built in a vacuum, it's built believing in and believing on the promises of God. Jesus is our divine warrior who fights for us.