

Date : 21 April 2024
Theme : Keeping the covenant relationship with God
Topic : Be strong and courageous to possess our inheritance
Key verse : Deuteronomy 31:6 "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Introduction:

We are reaching the end of Deuteronomy where Moses had finished giving the law to the second-generation Israelites and now, he was going to die and no longer able to lead them. The Israelites would soon lose the greatest leader and prophet.

The magnanimous Lord has promised abundant blessings to the Israelites because of the covenant relationship. But to receive and experience the abundant blessings, the Israelites had to first take possession of the land of Canaan. Without an anointed leader whom the Lord listened to, the Israelites were faced with an uncertain future. The Lord knew that fear and unfaith will prevent them from possessing their inheritance. Hence, we see the Israelites were being exhorted "be strong and courageous", 3 times in Deuteronomy 31.

We shall learn from the situation of the Israelites, how we can also "be strong and courageous".

1. Purpose: Take possession of the inheritance.

Deuteronomy 31:3,5 "... you will take possession of their land ... you must do to them (the enemies) all that I have commanded you."

a. The Israelites to take possession of the land of Canaan.

- The land of Canaan had been given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants. But possessing it and making it their own, required the Israelites to remove the people who were now occupying the land. God is the landlord who patiently endured the Canaanites who were enemies of God by their rebellion against Him in the darkest of idolatry and lawlessness. The land of Canaan was the Lord's special land, and the Lord had decided to transfer the land over to the Israelites at that time.
- Taking possession of the land was not a walk in the park because the enemies would certainly not hand the land over on a silver platter. It would involve fighting, injuries and even death. There were great risks when taking possession. The enemies were many, strong, aggressive, scheming, and they were giants. Though there were victories in the past, there were also defeats due to Israel's disobedience. Now with Moses leaving the scene, the feeling of discouragement and fear was without question.
- The Lord personally commissioned Joshua to take up leadership, and to bring the Israelites into the land that the Lord had promised. (v23). Joshua and the Israelites were exhorted to be strong and courageous and do not be afraid or terrified of them, but to go and take possession of the land.

b. For us to take possession by the Great Commission.

- What inheritance are we to take possession today? As believers in Christ, we have received salvation in Him and a wonderful place in heaven to be with Jesus who is now full of glory, honour and majesty. Yet God has also inheritance for us on earth to possess.
- The Lord commissioned Joshua to go and take possession of the land, and kill all the enemies and the nations in the land. Now, the Lord Jesus commissioned us to go and make disciples of all nations, baptise them and teach them. So we "kill" the enemies and nations by making them disciples of Jesus. Jesus commanded us to share the gospel, and to love and pray for our enemies.
- The most valuable inheritance is that which will last for eternity. Therefore, Jesus commanded us to store up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20). There is nothing we can bring from earth to heaven, except the souls of our loved ones and friends.
- The one who saves souls, is wise (Proverbs 11:30) and who causes a sinner to repent, saves his soul from hell (James 5:20). This treasure and inheritance is of infinite value, such that money cannot buy.

- Yet we will not have them unless we choose to take up the mission to take possession of the inheritance. Jesus puts us in places to give us the people as our inheritance. E.g. God gave to Paul the lives of all the 276 men on a ship, so that none would die due to the violent storm (Acts 27:24).
- Our inheritance includes finances, resources and land that we need to fulfil the great commission. God has given us the BB and GB ministry, Tampines 253 centre where we have the senior programmes and soon Royal Rangers, that we are able serve and touch the community with the love of God.
- God has also given each one of us, finances, resources, gifts and talents, our homes where we use to run Alphas and Happiness Groups. God has also given us neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces, where we have sphere of influence to demonstrate love and kindness of God, to introduce people to Jesus and share the gospel with them. We continue to exercise faith to build a house of prayer for all nations (Matthew 21:13), and be a physical and visible place for people to turn to Jesus. As Paul said "... that by all possible means I might save some." 1 Corinthians 9:22.
- Obeying the great commission also involves risks, losses, rejections and in extreme cases in other countries, life loss. The Lord Jesus said to Paul "take courage" as he continued to testify in other places (Acts 23:11). Obeying the great commission, taking possession of our inheritance will require us to "take courage". So how can we take courage?

2. Provision: The Lord has provided us 5 things that we can be "strong and courageous."

a. God's presence assured:

Deuteronomy 31:6 "... for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you".

Moses would no longer lead the Israelites. But the Lord, God of the Israelites, would be with the Israelites, never leave them nor forsake them. Problem with many of us is that we depend on what is visible and fail to depend on God because He is invisible. Moses recognized they would not be able to do without God's presence and pleaded God not to leave them otherwise they will not go anywhere. (Exodus 33:14-16)

- The Lord Jesus also promised as He commissioned us, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age". He said He will be with us when we do the great commission, "surely", "always" and "to the very end". Matthew 28:20.
- The authorities were astonished to see the courage of Peter and John even after they were put in prison, and concluded that they were with Jesus. Acts 4:13.

b. God's Spirit to assist:

Many are crippled by the fear of lack of knowledge and wisdom. God gave the spirit of wisdom to Joshua to lead the Israelites (Deuteronomy 34:9). The wisest king of Israel Solomon wasn't naturally born with the highest IQ. He asked the Lord to give him wisdom to lead Israel and the Lord was pleased to give to him and also gave him what he didn't ask – wealth and honour. 1 Kings 3:7-12

- The Lord Jesus didn't simply commission us to make disciples. He knows that we need help and He gives us the Holy Spirit. So that we will have power to be His witness (Acts 1:8), that we have spiritual gifts such as healing, word of knowledge, and also to teach us what to do and how to speak (Matthew 10:19).
- Our magnanimous God promised to give wisdom generously to all who asks Him. James 1:5.

c. God's deliverance promised:

God himself will destroy those nations and deliver them to the Israelites (v3), yet God will not do it alone. God moved when the Israelites moved. It was in the invisible where spiritual battles were fought and won, on the first day of Daniel's prayer (Daniel 10:12-13). While God works behind the scenes, God's primary way is to work with covenant partners.

- The salvation of Cornelius's household (Acts 10) and the Ethiopian eunuch happened because Peter (Acts 10:19) and Philip (Acts 8:29) were obedient to go as the Holy Spirit instructed them.
- Galatians 6:7-9 says that we reap what we sow. If we sow the gospel, we will reap a harvest of souls if we do not give up. Jesus says one sows and another reaps, so both may rejoice together.

d. God's commission to accept:

God commissioned Joshua to lead the Israelites (v14). He was a great army general by then, but he demonstrated faith to accept the role given to him to lead a group of people to fight the Amalekites (Exodus 17:9). The Israelites just crossed the red sea not too long ago, they were just refugees without establishment of any leaders, they had no army, and Joshua was commissioned by Moses to lead the fight.

- The commission by the king, being entrusted, would be a highly honoured one. So for King Jesus to commission us with the great commission, it is the greatest honour that we can receive, that we have the opportunity to be involved in the greatest work that we can ever have. This commission is a commission of partnership that we get to work with the Almighty Lord and King Jesus. Matthew 28:19

e. God's authority available:

God gave authority to Joshua to lead (Numbers 27:20), so that the nation of 2 million Israelites would listen to him and his instructions where to go and where to stay.

- Who would listen to us? Why should people listen to us? Before Jesus commissioned us, He said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." It is not some, but all. It is not just on earth but also in heaven. Then He commissioned with all His authority "Therefore go .." and gave us also the authority in His name, to preach, heal, and cast out demons Mark 16:15-18.

God has provided all we need to be strong and courageous. But they will only be useful if we exercise faith and use them to take possession of our inheritance.

Application

What areas do I need to be strong and courageous and how would I do so?

- A. Pray daily and take possessions of the lost souls that God entrusted to me.
- B. Overcome fears and discouragement to share the gospel with the lost.
- C. Depend on God's provisions: presence, deliverance, Spirit, commission, authority.