

The Best Is Yet To Come: Part 1

Strong & Courageous (Forks Up)

Joshua 1:1-9

Memory Verses: Joshua 1:9

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Not too long ago we all sat down to eat Thanksgiving meal. Now that's usually the biggest meal of the year. Turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, gravy, biscuits, pumpkin pie, apple crisp. Is anyone getting hungry yet? And then just a few weeks ago we had the second biggest meal of the year for Christmas. Perhaps you had the traditional ham, or perhaps you did what my family did and played what I like to call Christmas dinner roulette. Your not familiar with this game? So what we do is... we let everyone in the family write down two items they want for Christmas dinner... even Hudson... even Vera.... and whatever they write down... it will be made and put on the table. I am the only one who actually asked for something resembling a Christmas entree. I asked for meatloaf and mashed potatoes... but we also had taquitos, mozzarella sticks, pizza roles, doughnuts, and ice-cream cake. And.... cold baby carrots. We ate it all together... dinner and desert all together.

Now where am I going with this you ask? Well I'll tell ya. When you came in today each of you had a **fork on your seat.** And no, it's not for stabbing your neighbor... unless its absolutely necessary. For many of you, you know exactly what this means... for the rest of you, let me explain. Four years ago our church was without a pastor, and there was a lot of unrest. Freddy Vicks, who had been a faithful pastor in our church for forty years had retired... and we were in a place of uncertainty. And Don Johnson, one of our most faithful leaders ever, stepped into the pulpit to offer a word of encouragement to the congregation and he held up a fork and said something like this... "when you finish a good meal you may be encouraged to put your fork in the sink... and our church has had a really good run and some may be tempted to think its over.... but it's not.... dessert is on the way.... and so hold on to your forks... the best is yet to come." Something like that. And for the past four years that has been a rallying cry for our church... don't give up... "the best is yet to come."

Well today I want to let you know that you need to hold on to your forks... because the best is yet to come. For the past four years we've been eating a very robust meal... the work has been hard... and long... and at times hard to swallow... and as we look to relaunch our church in two very short weeks, we may be tempted once again to think that the job

is almost over and we can put our forks in the sink. No, you gotta hold onto them forks because the best is yet to come. Or, as 2019 closes and 2020 begins you may be tempted to take a huge sigh of relief and now take it easy... but you can't... you have to hold on to your fork, because the best is yet to come.... because dessert is on the way. But then... more meal is on the way too. What?

Get this... this is huge.... It's not hard work and then reward and then we are done. The ministry is never going to be done... and the reward is never going to be done. It's more like Christmas roulette at the Sloanes where we eat the dinner and the dessert at the same time. The best isn't just yet to come... the best is here and yet to come all at the same time. It's always dinner and its always dessert. So don't even think about putting that fork down we've got more ministry to do... and we have more reward to celebrate... dinner and dessert at the same time. Are yall with me? Just hold on to your forks!

Maybe it will make more sense as we look at the Word this morning. Go ahead and turn over to and let's read **Joshua chapter 1:1-9**. This is the perfect "new chapter" passage of the bible. The 40 years in the wilderness is over... Moses has died and a new leader has taken the reigns... and the promised land is in reach. The Israelites could be tempted just as we might be.. to rest in the fact that the hard part is over and let out a sigh of relief and take it easy... But God let's them know that as one journey ends... another one begins... they can't let up. In fact, even though their next journey is to claim the promised land, the dessert if you will. They've left the desert for the dessert. But the dessert is still going to be challenging. They have to go to war with the current inhabitants of the land, they have to keep from falling into the sinless culture of the current occupants of the land, and they have to learn how to be a nation that represents the God of the universe to the rest of the world.

Listen, praise God we are relaunching with a new building, in a new community, with a new name, and a fresh start... but all of that comes with new challenges. New people to disciple. New people who will come in and add new faces, new personalities, and new ideas to our family. New programs as we grow... that will require new leaders, new teachers, and more time on our part as a church body. We may have to go to two services, or three services, or begin another building campaign, or who knows what. So... we had better be strong and courageous and we had better keep our forks ready. **Keep Your Forks Ready... Because the Best is Yet To Come... and Our Ministry Isn't Done**

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first encouragement we see here from Joshua 1 is... **Be Strong & Courageous For No One Can Stand Against Us.** Look again... In just

these short 9 verses the phrase be strong and courageous is said three times. If anything, God wants his people to be keep their forks ready with strength and courage.

But, where does this strength and courage come from? We could be tempted to hear this and think... we can be strong and courageous in our own strength. Or that that is what we are being told to do. But this is not the case at all. Remember where the Israelites have been and how they have prevailed. The 10 plagues of Egypt – not their strength, the splitting of the red sea – not their strength, mana & quail from heaven – not their strength, water from the rock – not their strength. Their strength just as our strength comes from GOD. And this will be proven again in just a few short days when the walls of Jericho come down miraculously by the strength of the Lord. To be strong and courageous means to rely upon the strength and power of God who fights for you.

And, because God fights for you... no one can stand against you (vs5). In our new chapter as a church... get this... no one can cause us to fall as long as we keep our faith in the power of God. You may ask... what men might try to stand against us or what challenges of men may we face?

Well, the first is the **Division of men from within**. The divisions of men from within are the greatest threat the church faces in our day and time. These divisions destroy churches all the time. They start with a frustration which leads to gossip which leads to slander which leads to secret meetings... and before you know it the church is split. This is Satan's greatest weapon against us... that we would destroy ourselves from the inside out... but they will not destroy us. We will be strong and courageous against these divisions. We will not fall apart at the first sign of disagreement... rather we will work out our problems... we will remain unified in Christ. We will not gossip or slander behind peoples backs because we will be determined to bear with one another in love and grace.

The second is the **Distractions of men** from the outside. Satan knows if he can't divide us, perhaps he can distract us. So he sends men to occupy our time with sports, hobbies, jobs, or entertainment... But we must remember... none of this is more important than the ministry we've been given. We will be strong and courageous and we will resolve to continue our ministry for it is the most important thing we can do.

The third is the **Destruction of men** from the outside. Satan's last strategy if he can't divide us and he can't distract us is to destroy us. If he can just get the government to stop us from worshipping. If he can just get people to criticize and persecute us then perhaps we might give up. But this is what Satan doesn't understand about a real church... we will be strong and courageous to be the church even if they take away our building and even if they take away our religious freedoms. We will

take this thing underground like our brothers in China and Iran and North Korea.

Get this... no one can stand against in our ministry ... not even, according to **Matthew 16:18**, the gates of hell. Look... **There is nothing that can stand against us as long as we stand with the strength of God.**

And one other thing we must keep in mind... is that the ministry we fight for is not to be seen as a chore or as mundane labor. When we say there is work to do we are talking about the joyful and exciting ministry of discipling and leading people to Christ. It is a joyful and fulfilling ministry not a heavy and grueling work. Sometimes work is hard and laborious... but when we work for the lord look at this... we do it with the strength of God. Look at **Matthew 11:28-30** . When we work for the lord in ministry... the work feels light. Get this... **his burden is light cause he's doing most of the heavy lifting.**

The work is light, joyful, fulfilling... and not one can stop us! So be strong and courageous and... **Keep Your Forks Ready... Because the Best is Yet To Come... and Our Ministry Isn't Done**

Secondly... **Be Strong & Courageous For Our Success Is Secure.** Our success is secure as long as we keep the Bible the center of our ministry and as long as God is with us. Look at verses 7-8. We must keep the Bible as the center of our ministry (vs7-8) and as long as we do that we are guaranteed success and prosperity as a church. What does keeping the Bible at the center of our ministry mean? It means that we are careful to do according the law. When we follow the word we worship the Lord. It means we are careful to follow its commandments. When we obey his commands we show our faith to be real. It means that we do not turn from it to the right hand or the left. When we stay on the path we prove ourselves dependent upon God. It means we don't let it depart from our mouth. When we preach and teach the word we share the Gospel of Christ with a world in need of salvation. And it means that we meditate on it day and night. When we study the word we fill our minds with the mind of God. The point is simple... **As soon as we abandon the Bible we will cease to be a church.**

But our success is secure also... because God is with us wherever we go (vs9). Guys... the holy spirit lives in us and the holy spirit is alive in the midst of his church. As long as spirit filled people make up the partners of this church we will have the Spirit of God with us wherever we go... and we will be successful in bringing people to Christ and disciplining believers . Listen... **as long as we stay faithful to the word of God and as long as our church is filled with the presence of God we can't fail .. so Keep Your Forks Ready... Because the Best is Yet To Come... and Our Ministry Isn't Done**

Application (Resolution, You)

How can we be anything but encouraged for this next chapter? The Lord is strengthening us, The Word is guiding us, The Holy Spirit is comforting us, and No one can stand against us... and Our success is secure. The next chapter is our dessert... but its also another meal. So... **Keep Your Forks Ready... Because the Best is Yet To Come... and Our Ministry Isn't Done**

Conclusion

So... lift up your forks with me. Lift them as a sign of dedication to the Lord and to the ministry he is calling us to in our next chapter. Lift them as a dedication to be strong and courageous as we begin this new work. And let us pray that God would lead us to this promised land and that we would make him proud.