

## **John 2, Joshua 1**

Two stories of two people beginning new tasks.

Joshua is taking over leading the people of Israel

Jesus beginning his ministry

For both, in different ways, it had the potential to be daunting.

Joshua is an old man by this point. He'd have been maybe about 80. He's been the number 2 to Moses for a long time. Moses would have been a hard act to follow, a great man of God. But this great man of God was not allowed to be the one to take the people of Israel into the promised land. He'd made a mistake and it had cost him dear. Joshua instead is the new chosen man to lead and he'd have known how difficult it was to lead the people of Israel! They were not renowned for being on the best behaviour all the time. This was going to be a challenge.

For Jesus, he's got the challenge of proclaiming the coming of God's kingdom to a people who'd gone well off track. The set up in the temple is symptomatic of the failing state of spiritual heart of the nation. The temple was supposed to be a place to worship God and seek his forgiveness through sacrifice but it was now a place of big business. The temple court in which the buying and selling was taking place was the court of the Gentiles. It was supposed to be a place where non-jews could come to worship (they were barred from the main courts under pain of death) but now there was no place for them. Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations but instead it had excluded them. The money changers were there fleecing people. You couldn't use Roman coins to buy animals there (the face of the Emperor was considered a graven image) so you had to change your money into the temple money to buy something. You can imagine the exchange rates were not favourable!

This makes Jesus' blood boil! He's angry but it's a righteous anger burning against the injustice he sees, "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" he shouts. He turns over the tables and drives them all out, effectively reopening the court to be a place of worship. The result though? Jesus makes enemies and powerful ones at that. He is a marked man. It's not because he has done wrong but because he has upheld right. A simpler path may have been to walk away and leave them to it and instead speak to people elsewhere. But Jesus knows the temple is a symbolic place, it represents the people's spiritual heart. If the temple is not right, how can anything else be right? Striking against the rottenness at the core was a powerful act and demonstration to the common people that he was going to bring change.

For Joshua, he doesn't have the reassurance of being God incarnate! Joshua is just a man. He's seen the highs and lows of the people of Israel as they've left Egypt and wandered in the wilderness. God now gives him the command to take the people across the Jordan river and into the promised land. There's probably a million questions going through his head – are the people going to grumble? Are

they going to rebel again? Is this just another false dawn? Will I really see the people settled in the land God as promised or will it be after my time? B

But God gives him this message, "I will..." This is God promising that he will deliver. The time is now. "I will give you every place where you set your foot..." "I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." These are powerful words. God will do the hard work. What does Joshua have to do? "Be strong and courageous." God says this to him three times, a promise bound up in this repetition. Joshua can be strong and courageous because he knows that this is no fool's errand, God is going with him to guarantee success. The only other thing that Joshua needs to do is stick to the commands of God, "Be careful to obey all of the law... do not turn to the right of it nor the left..." Again, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night... then you will be prosperous and successful."

Follow the instruction manual and follow me. It sounds simple but in reality, it still needs courageous and strength to do. It would be easy if there was no one else around! But for both Jesus and Joshua they were in the world and surrounded by people who would oppose them. We see it quite markedly in the story of Jesus but it's there rumbling in the background of Joshua's journey. When we walk in God's paths, we can expect opposition. The world doesn't like it and neither does Satan.

These words spoken to Joshua are pinned up on my computer at home. They're words we could all do worse than to put up in a prominent place. A promise that when God calls us, God goes before us. All he asks is that we walk in his paths, not the world's with all the false promises that are thrown our way, but God's and then to be strong and courageous. It's not easy but we can see the results when we look at the rest of the lives of Joshua and Jesus.