

## **New Beginnings** **Joshua 1:1-9**

Moses is dead. In order to take in the full weight of that statement you must place it in its historical context. Moses has been the senior leader of the Hebrew people for more than forty years. Moses burst onto the scene at a time when the Hebrew people had been slaves in Egypt for four hundred years. Do you understand what 400 years of slavery does to the psychological profile of a culture? Twelve generations had come and gone since the call of Abraham ... and the descendents of Abraham had lost all sense of who they were. The first thing that slavery steals from a person, after it has stolen their freedom, is their identity ... oppression first erases your name, dehumanizing you, making you nothing more than a number tattooed on your forearm. It does that in order that you will forget all sense of community and your distinctive destiny ... your legacy. That's what Egypt had done to the children of Israel.

Moses simply pointed out that they were worth more than the number of bricks they could produce ... that there was something bigger than that, that defined them. Moses reminded them that they had a unique and powerful identity as children of God. He convinced them that they were a people of divine destiny. He rallied them around their affiliation with a God that they had long forgotten ... and pointed them, anew, to their collective identity as an overcoming people. He taught them, once again, to trust in the power of their God, and to release their lives into his sovereign care. It was no small task ... teaching them this. In fact ... in many ways ... it was a forty year task.

You remember the story ... burning bushes, plagues, death angels, parting seas, Mt. Sinai, stone tablets, Golden calves, manna and quail, water from a rock, highs and lows, ups and downs, good and bad, happy and mad, we're glad we left ... why did we every leave? Through it all ... the one constant ... was Moses ... the one who walked up the mountain and spoke face to face with God ... the one whose face shone with the glory of God ... the one who had given them, again and again, the words of God ... the one constant through forty years of nomadic wilderness was their senior leader ... Moses ... there would never be another Moses. And now ... he is dead.

And in that vacuum of leadership God speaks a word ... and he says to Joshua ... it's time for a New Beginning. Moses is dead and with his death the last of the Egyptian born Hebrews has passed. A new generation with no memory of Egypt is ready for a New Beginning ... and they will soon learn that their God is a God who specializes in New Beginnings.

Now before you take this analogy too far ... I want to clarify a few things ... Analogies are dangerous things when they take on a life of their own. Allow me to clarify. Buckner has NOT spent the last forty years wondering around in some wilderness. Buckner has NOT been bound by slavery in Egypt. Ken Hall is not Moses and he is certainly not dead. Ken Hall is a fantastic man of God and a great leader and thankfully has a lot left to contribute to the incredible organization that he has led faithfully for the last 16 years. So be careful about taking this analogy too far.

In fact, I don't think this is a story about leadership at all. This isn't a story about Moses or Joshua ... this is a story about God. It's a story about transitions and critical moments in history – God's history with his people. And that's why I chose it. The Buckner story is not the story of Ken Hall or Albert Reyes – it is a story about God – about what God has done, is doing, and will do in the lives of children and elders.

What we find in this ancient piece of Hebrew history is NOT a lesson on leadership, but rather a portrait of the way God works with his children. We learn here that God is the God of new beginnings and in his perfect time he will always re-create us more and more into his perfect image. God seems to say ... It is time again for these, my children, to become more than what they have been. They have seen my miraculous power in the sight of powerful plagues, parting seas, and volcanic mountains. They have experienced my sovereign care in the defeat of their greatest enemy, the revelation of my Law, and the provision of daily manna and quail. After forty years they have learned to depend on me and only me ... and now they are ready ... it is time for them to become all I created them to be.

And so you ... Joshua ... you lead them. And Joshua says, "I don't know, God. I'm no Moses." Joshua wasn't there at the burning bush when Moses said, "I don't know God, I'm no Aaron." It's a scary thing ... crossing rivers ... walking out into the unknown ... fighting battles without an army ... it's a scary thing.

And God says to Joshua ... this is what you tell the people (and so I am telling you): Remember ... I have made certain promises to you ... We have God's promises. It's no small thing when you hear God say, "I promise."

The concept of God's promise is prevalent in his admonition to Joshua. We see it in verse 3 – "I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses." He then goes on, in verse 4, to describe what will become known as "The Promised Land." In verse 5 he reiterates the two-fold promise. Number one: No one will be able to stand up against you. And number two: I will be with you always. We see it again in verse 6: "You will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them." God says, "I made a promise and I am always true to my promises." God's promises may be deferred but they will always be fulfilled.

Albert I encourage you to always keep before you the promises he made to you when he called you to his ministry and when he called you to this great task. And Buckner I encourage you to always remember the promises God has made to you – the promises he has affirmed again and again throughout our history – We are doing his work and he has promised that he will always provide.

God reminds them of his PROMISE and then he points them to his PRECEPTS. He tells us that we have his precepts ... his Law. God says you can go forward now and be successful IF my Word is written on your hearts ... you will march forward and prosper IF my precepts are written into the ethos of your culture.

We do a lot of incredible things at Buckner. But in the end, it always comes back to the children and elders – to those who are in need – they are the driving passion of our work and Jesus Christ is the heart that drives us. We build communities that know how to love. But in the eternal scheme of things it's all for naught if it is not Christ-centered. He is the Word that gives life and light to our world and to our communities.

Albert I encourage you as you lead to always keep God's Word close to your heart and to your life. His Word will give you strength and direction. And Buckner family I ask you to pray for your leader. Pray for the one who IS the WORD to fill this place and that HIS SPIRIT would lead us into all the good things he has for us.

We have his promises and his precepts (his Word) and his presence. So important is this truth that God repeats it – v. 5 – “As I was with Moses so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you,” and again in v. 9 – “the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” It's the theme that runs through everything in Scripture ... from the Garden of Eden to the Christmas stable to the cross at Golgotha ... to the vision in Revelation ... God is with us ... always redeeming us ... always loving us ... always fighting to be with us.

There were two great crossings in ancient Hebrew thought: The first was the crossing of the Red Sea (they celebrate it to this day). The second, however, was just as important: The crossing of the Jordan River. In chapter 3 of Joshua ... the waters of the Jordan will part just like the Red Sea and the children of God will walk across on dry ground. Awaiting them on the other side are battles yet unseen, obstacles large in their imagination, walls that must somehow come down ... yet, the children of Israel find a way to close their eyes, say a prayer, and leap across the abyss into a new land and a new future. This historic crossing in Joshua, chapter one was seen by subsequent generations as a symbol of God's divine presence ... they we are able to make the leap only because God was with them ...

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God ...  
And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us ...  
And He will be called Emanuel ... God is with us ...

And because he is with us we can be strong and courageous ... because He is with us we can walk through the valley of the shadow of death and we will fear no evil ... WHY?  
Because HE is with us ...

My paternal grandfather came to the United States from Monterrey, Mexico in 1919 to save his family from the starvation precipitated by the Mexican revolutionary war. He didn't want to leave his homeland nor his family. He was scared, I'm sure. But he was left with little choice. So he closed his eyes, said a prayer, and leapt across the abyss into a new land ... a new future. He settled his family in a little Italian farming community just south of Houston, called Old Genoa. When I was a child my grandfather lived with us, on the land he had given to his son, my father. He didn't speak much English. I

didn't speak much Spanish. He would speak in Spanish. I would answer in English, and we understood each other perfectly. I loved my grandfather very much.

When he came to the United States he made the trek mostly on horseback and covered wagon. The world we live in is nothing like the world he was helping to build. Upon entering the United States He passed through a little dirt town on the border called McAllen – the same town where I would pastor an amazing church for ten years. He picked cotton in the fields of central Texas just east of a little military school called Texas A&M University – The same school where I would graduate with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. My grandfather did not live see any of this. That kind of backbreaking slave labor tends to be life-shortening. But that's O.K. Because his legacy and his spirit lives on in me whenever I am willing to close my eyes, say a prayer, and leap across the abyss into a new land ... a new future. My grandfather was just one of thousands, no millions ... whose children and grandchildren are waiting for us to be Jesus Christ to the orphan and the widow in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church. Albert you are our leader. We stand ready to follow. Let us join hands and hearts as we close our eyes, say a prayer and leap across the abyss into a new land with new challenges and new possibilities – a new future where God awaits to lead us and use us for His Kingdom work.