



As many of you probably know, I'm the recovery pastor at Peninsula Bible Church. That means, I spend most of my time working with people who are struggling with various addictions, primarily addictions to drugs and alcohol. As many of you probably also know, part of the reason I'm the recovery pastor is because I have (how shall I put it ...) certain qualifications—certain personal experiences—in the area of substance abuse. In fact, as I often tell people, I spent twenty years living in the 60's, high on drugs and turning my body into a chemistry experiment.

During my second decade of living in the 1960's—a decade most people refer to as the 1970's!—there was a very popular record album by Carole King called *Tapestry*. The album won the Grammy Award for album of the year in 1972, selling 25 million copies worldwide. The album also contains a favorite song of mine called "Home Again," which begins with the lines,

*Sometimes I wonder if I'm ever gonna make
it home again
It's so far and out of sight
I really need someone to talk to, and nobody else
Knows how to comfort me tonight*

The song should probably be sung in order to get its full impact, but since I only have one note and since I have a hard time even locating that one, I'm going to spare you. However ... whether sung or spoken, I've always found the first two lines especially moving—"Sometimes I wonder if I'm ever gonna make it home again/It's so far and out of sight." I've definitely felt that way at different times in my life, mostly when I was strung out on drugs and wandering aimlessly from one place to another. I felt like I was a million miles from home—a million miles from where I belonged—and I wondered if I was ever going to make it home again. Perhaps some of you have felt that same way.

Ultimately, as I've now come to realize, being at home is more about a life than a place. Woody Allen once said, "My only regret is that I wasn't born as someone else." His only regret was that he didn't have an entirely different life. He didn't like the life he'd been given—he didn't feel 'at home' in his own life—and as a result he was miserable.

That was my experience as well. I longed for a life—a life that somehow felt right, that somehow felt like home—but I just couldn't seem to find it. I went from place to place, trying to feel at home, the result was always the same: I still didn't like who I was. As the old saying goes, "Wherever you go, there you are!"

Well ... with that in mind—with the idea of 'home' and wondering if you're ever going to make it home again—you'll remember that we're currently going through the entire Bible in a nine month journey entitled *Epic: The astonishing story of God and the world*. You'll also remember, earlier in the journey, God promised Abraham and his descendants a home. He promised them a place where they could live—a land filled with milk and honey where they could settle down and have the lives he'd intended for them.

However, as we learned in Genesis, Abraham spent many years wandering in the Promised Land but never actually took possession of it. He never actually settled in the land. This was also true for his son, Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob. Later, Jacob's twelve sons left the Promised Land altogether and went to Egypt, where their descendants stayed for 430 years until Moses finally led them out of Egypt and into the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. All in all, Abraham and his descendants spent roughly 600 years without a home. They spent centuries singing some ancient Hebrew variation of "Home Again," wondering if they were ever going to make it home again—ever going to make it to a place where they truly felt like they belonged.

From last week's study, you'll also remember that the Israelites had an opportunity to enter the Promised Land, but they shrank back in fear. In Numbers 13, as Paul told us last week, Moses sent twelve spies into the land on a reconnaissance mission. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, encouraged the people to move forward in faith. The other spies shrank back in fear, persuading the people that the giants and the fortified cities were simply too powerful to be defeated. As a result, God condemned the entire generation—everyone over the age of twenty—to wander and die in the wilderness.

Part of what I'd like to suggest this morning is that many Christians have made a similar unfortunate choice.

Instead of moving forward in faith, they've shrunk back in fear. Instead of moving forward into the Promised Land—moving forward into the life that God has promised them—they have refused to fight the giants and the fortified cities. As a result, their Christian experience has ended up like a barren, desolate, and bleak wilderness. They have never really made it home, have never really found a life flowing with milk and honey.

In an ultimate sense, our final home as Christians is of course heaven. Jesus declared in John 14 that he was going to prepare a place for us—a home for us—where we could be with him forever. And yet, in another sense, we can begin entering into that home, into that life, right now. We can begin experiencing a relationship with God in this world, along with the fruit of the Spirit, including an increasing sense of the love, joy, and peace.

However, in order to experience this fruit of the Spirit, we need to be willing to fight the giants. We need to be willing to battle the areas in our lives where the power of sin still has its strongholds. If we are willing to fight the battles—battles against strongholds like addiction, anger, self-pity, pride, envy, lust, procrastination, etc.—then we will increasingly have lives that are filled with milk and honey. If we are unwilling to fight the battles—if we shrink back in fear, then our lives will continue to seem as barren, desolate, and bleak as the Sinai Peninsula or Death Valley.

Today, we're going to be looking at the book of Joshua—the sixth book of the Bible—which is about how the Israelites finally entered, conquered, and settled the land. Joshua is one of the great historical books of the Old Testament, recounting how the Israelites finally found a national home. It's about how they finally took possession of the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants so many centuries earlier.

In addition, as many have observed, the book also provides valuable spiritual lessons—especially lessons about how to move forward in faith rather than shrink back in fear. Moreover, it shows us how to battle our own giants and fortified cities as we seek to take possession of the life that God intends for us. To put it somewhat differently, the book of Joshua is for those who are ready to leave the wilderness and move forward into the Promised Land, searching for a home, knowing that the search will include intense battles and great victories.

As far as the overall book of Joshua is concerned, as I just suggested, the book can be divided into three parts related to the words 'entering, conquering, and settling.' Chapters 1-5 tell how the Israelites entered the Promised Land, chapters 6-12 tell how they conquered the Promised

Land, and chapters 13-22 tell how they settled the Promised Land. The final two chapters—chapters 23 and 24—are Joshua's farewell address where he declares God's faithfulness and urges the Israelites to continue moving forward in faith or suffer disastrous consequences.

Given the three-part division of the book, our time this morning will focus on the key word associated with each division—entering, conquering, and settling. How did the Israelites enter the land, how did they conquer the land, and how did they settle the land? In addition, hopefully, we'll also learn some lessons about moving forward in our own journey of faith. How can we enter into the areas God is calling us to enter, how can we conquer the enemies God is calling us to conquer, and how can we settle into the lives God is calling us to live?

Entering the Land

When it comes to entering the land—entering into the areas of our lives that are potentially difficult, dangerous, and terrifying—the question of course is: how is it possible to do that? How is it possible to move forward when we're afraid? How is it possible to confront our fears rather than simply running away? This was the question the Israelites faced on the edge of the Promised Land around 1400 B.C., and it's the question that continues to face each of us today.

Thankfully, chapter 1 of Joshua addresses this very subject—the subject of facing our fears. God knew that the Israelites had a long history of being afraid, and God knows that you and I most likely have a long history of being afraid as well. The Israelites' fear, along with our own, comes as no surprise to God. God knows that we often live in fear, and he knows that our fear separates us from life—separates us from the life he wants us to live. Consequently, in chapter 1, God addresses the subject of how to enter this painful territory. He addresses the subject of how to become willing to confront our fears—to become willing to even consider taking on the giants and the fortified cities.

Joshua 1:6-9:

“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you

will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Clearly, the repeated refrain in these verses is ‘Be strong and courageous’ or ‘Be strong and very courageous.’ In one sense, God’s words may seem self-evident—like a mere statement of the obvious. When people are afraid, they need to be strong and courageous. And yet, as Doug Goins once observed, “People need encouragement more than advice.” People often know what they need to do, but they lack the encouragement to move forward and do it. What they need is the repeated encouragement of those who love and care about them; and especially the repeated encouragement that comes directly from God.

For example, when I’m working with addicts and alcoholics, it’s usually not helpful for me to offer them advice like, “You need to stop drinking” or “You need to stop shooting heroin.” In the vast majority of cases, addicts and alcoholics are already painfully aware of their need to stop shooting heroin and guzzling vodka. What they really need is encouragement—encouragement to battle these powerful and longstanding strongholds. In particular, as I said, they need the ongoing encouragement of God. However, one of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament is the gift of encouragement (Romans 12:8)—God’s encouragement working through God’s people. I believe this is one of the most vitally needed gifts in the church today—the gift of encouraging one another in midst of battles that are often incredibly difficult and potentially filled with fear.

Of course, helpful as the gift of encouragement can be, simply telling someone to be strong and courageous doesn’t necessarily make them strong and courageous, any more than telling someone to be happy necessarily makes them happy. No doubt, God can work in this way, miraculously instilling strength and courage at his command, but more often than not he leads us through a process. Strength and courage don’t usually happen in a moment. They are character traits that God builds over time.

Thankfully, in these verses, God tells us the secret of this process. He tells us the secret of developing strength and courage—the kind of strength and courage that will allow Joshua and the Israelites to enter, conquer, and settle the Promised Land, and the kind of strength and courage that will allow you and me to do the same. This secret is revealed in verse 8 where the Lord says, “Do not let the Book of the Law depart from your *mouth*; *meditate* on it day and night, so that you may be careful to *do* everything

in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

We are of course New Testament saints, not Old Testament saints. For us, the law is no longer external, written on tablets of stone. Rather, it is internal, written on our hearts. As it says in Jeremiah 31:33, “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.” However, for both Old Testament saints and New Testament saints, the principle is the same: if we do things God’s way, we will receive strength and courage. If we do things God’s way, we will succeed in whatever he has called us to do.

More specifically, this verse contains three words that are at the center of the secret. The words are mouth, meditate, and do. First, we need to have words that are pleasing to God and reflective of God coming out of our mouths. Yes, we’re supposed to walk the walk, but it’s also critical to talk the talk. It’s important for our mouths to be praising God, conveying his truth, and speaking in ways that are in keeping with what his Word has declared. Our words should be in accordance with God’s Word.

Second, we need to meditate on God’s law—meditate on his Word. This is not some eastern notion of meditation, like Transcendental Meditation, where a mantra is repeated. Rather, biblical meditation involves a deep engagement of our hearts and minds. It has to do with our desire to encounter God as we prayerfully contemplate his Word. We should be longing to hear from God and to understand what he’s said, and we will never be strong and courageous until God’s Word has become deeply embedded, deeply internalized, rather than merely being words on a page.

And third, we need to do what God’s Word has told us to do. We should walk the walk, not just talk the talk, knowing that actions speak louder than words. Indeed, when there’s a difference—when our words are declaring one message and our actions another—most people will believe our actions over our words. Most people will believe that our actions are the real declaration of what we genuinely believe.

Mouth, meditate, do: these three words are at the core of gaining strength and courage. They are at the core of remaining close to God in every aspect of our lives. Hopefully, too, as we draw close to God, we will begin to realize that real strength and courage come from God himself. They do not come from us. They aren’t qualities that we can work ourselves into or somehow produce. As it says in Philippians, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). If we stay close to God in every aspect of our lives—with our mouths, with our meditations, and with our actions—God will

continually provide us the strength and courage we need. His strength and courage, not our own, will allow us to confront our fears and to enter into battles we've perhaps avoided for decades.

Once we begin to have strength and courage—God-given strength and courage—we're ready to enter the land. We're ready to face our fears and leave the wilderness behind. We're ready to fight the giants and the fortified cities, knowing, as it says in the New Testament, "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Sadly, we don't have time this morning to look at the wonderful stories of how the Israelites actually entered the land. We don't have time to look at the story of Rahab—the prostitute in the city of Jericho who came to faith (or, as one drug addict mistakenly called her, Rehab the prostitute!). We also don't have time to look at the miraculous way in which the Israelites crossed the Jordan River—a river God supernaturally parted for them just as he did the Red Sea when they left Egypt—nor do we have time to talk about how the Israelites set up memorial stones on the far side of the Jordan, nor do we have time to talk about how the Israelites reinstated circumcision and the Passover, which they had abandoned in the wilderness.

Since our purpose this morning is to provide an overview of the entire book, we need to move on—move from entering the land to conquering the land.

Conquering the Land

After crossing the Jordan River, the Israelites began their campaign of conquest—a campaign that lasted around seven years. Each of us of course has our own giants and fortified cities. We have ungodly habits, attitudes, ways of relating to people, thoughts, feelings, and motives that God wants to eliminate. In theological terms, this is the process of sanctification—the process whereby God increasingly transforms us into the image of Christ, destroying the strongholds of sin in our lives.

The question is: how can we fight these battles? How can we conquer what is ungodly? How, for example, can God take an angry, self-absorbed, self-pitying, drunken, dope-smoking Hippie like I was back in the 1960's and 70's and turn him into something different? How can God get us from there to here? How can he bring about real change in our lives?

Well ... as part of answering those questions, I'd like to spend a few minutes looking at the most famous battle in the book of Joshua—the Battle of Jericho. This is the

wonderful story of how the walls of Jericho came tumbling down after the Israelites marched around the city for seven days then blew their trumpets and shouted. It's also a story that pictures how we can fight battles in our own lives, especially battles against long-standing strongholds of sin.

The actual battle plan for conquering the city of Jericho, which was given to Joshua by the Lord himself, is recorded in Joshua 6.

Joshua 6:3-5:

“March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound of a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.”

Without question, this battle plan is unlike any in history—and certainly unlike any taught at West Point or Annapolis. Instead of engaging in conventional warfare (building a siege ramp, shooting flaming arrows over the walls, or battering down the city gate), the Lord commands Joshua to follow an apparently ridiculous or even laughable strategy. The idea of conquering a city by simply walking around it and making a lot of noise just doesn't make sense—at least from a human standpoint.

And yet, as the apostle Paul tells us, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4). Part of conquering the fortified cities and the giants in our own lives involves learning how to follow God's battle plan, rather than our own. This is essentially the same idea expressed in Proverbs 3:5, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” If we trust in God, seeking to do things his way rather than our own, he will make our paths straight—he will give us the victory—even when God's battle plan might seem to go counter to our own understanding and feelings.

When I first became a Christian, more mature believers told me, “Read your Bible, pray, be in fellowship with other Christians, and look for opportunities to serve others.” This sounded like a very strange battle plan to me—as strange as marching around a city, making a lot of noise, and hoping that the walls would somehow fall

down. The plan just didn't make sense to me. And yet, I did what I was told, and as the years have passed by, the walls of many enemy cities have come tumbling down. God has given me the victory over many areas of sin in my life, and as a result my life has genuinely changed for the better. Of course ... I'm still a work in progress (and if you don't believe it, just ask my wife!), but thankfully I know that "he who began a good work ... will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6).

Ultimately, the lesson is this: if we enter the land trusting in God's strength and courage, we must also conquer the land relying on his plan. If we trust in his power and rely on his plan, then God will cause even the greatest enemy strongholds to collapse in defeat. As it says in Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

The Israelites did in fact trust in God's power and rely on his plan, and, as he has promised, God gave them an absolutely incredible and miraculous victory.

Joshua 6:20-21:

When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city. The devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.

The victory was one that involved the complete annihilation of the enemy. This idea can be very difficult for us to understand—the idea of slaughtering of men, women, children, and even livestock. The concept of genocide in the Old Testament can be difficult to comprehend. However, from the standpoint of personal application, its meaning is much more straightforward. We should long to have evil completely eliminated from our lives. We shouldn't want a single trace of it to remain. If you're battling pornography, get rid of every website on your computer and every magazine in your house—don't leave a single one around! If you're struggling with alcohol, get rid of every drop! Don't hide a bottle of whiskey under your bed and two bottles of chardonnay in your broom closet. If you don't completely get rid of those things—completely annihilate them—they will come back to bite you later. They will come back to tempt, entice, and ensnare you—and they'll most likely do it sooner rather than later.

Unfortunately, in their conquest of the land, the Israelites didn't completely get rid of the presence of evil.

They didn't completely wipe out the inhabitants, and their disobedience came back to tempt, entice, and ensnare them within a generation. As the Lord had told them beforehand, if the inhabitants were not utterly destroyed, "... they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshipping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 20:18). Evil is not inert. It doesn't simply exist benignly and harmlessly. Rather, it is like malignant cancer. If every trace is not removed, it will grow back, spread, and eventually kill—and if we imagine otherwise we're kidding ourselves.

Well ... as I said, the Battle of Jericho was the first battle in the Israelites' conquest of the land. The main campaigns lasted for seven years, with the Israelites using a 'divide and conquer' strategy—first cutting through the middle of the country and dividing it in half, then conquering the southern region followed later by the northern. Mop-up operations continued for years.

In most of the battles, the Israelites used conventional warfare. The walls didn't simply come tumbling down at every new city they fought. In terms of application ... in my own life I've found that God sometimes does amazing miracles—miracles that are very encouraging. And yet, on most days, there's no audible voice speaking from the sky and no earth-shaking signs and wonders. On most days, I'm just moving forward—reading my Bible, praying, staying in fellowship, and seeking to be of service. The dramatic miracles are wonderful, but the picture painted in the book of Joshua is not one of continuous miracles. Rather, it is primarily one of faithfully moving ahead day after day, marching down hot dusty roads—roads that eventually lead to the next difficult battle, usually a battle that involves agonizing hand-to-hand combat.

After seven years—after the main fighting had ended—the Israelites began moving into the third phase. They had entered the land, they had conquered the land, and now they began to settle the land. They began to divide the land among the different tribes, leaving mop-up operations to be carried out by the individual tribes in their own allotted areas.

Settling the Land

Initially, settling the land involved answering the basic question: who gets what? Who gets which piece of land? Who gets which parcel, which allotment? This question was mainly answered through a method known as casting lots. We don't know exactly what this practice looked like, although it's mentioned seventy times in the Old Testament and seven times in the New. Some commentators have speculated that casting lots may have

involved throwing sticks, rocks, or coins, and that it may have been similar to our modern practice of flipping a coin. Ultimately, the idea was to reach an impartial decision.

Interestingly, although casting lots was impartial, it was not impersonal. As it says in Proverbs 16:33, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.” God was behind the division of the land. The outcome actually came from him. This was something the Israelites clearly understood, even though the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (the sons of Joseph) complained about the land that had been allotted to them. Similarly, our own ‘lot in life’—our own allotment from God—may sometimes appear to be simply an impersonal occurrence, simply ‘the luck of the draw.’ And yet, the Bible teaches that “every decision is from the Lord.” There is no such thing as blind luck, pure chance, or mere coincidence. In the end, the Lord’s hand is involved in every detail, both in terms of our individual lives and our collective lives, even though we may sometimes complain, just as the Israelites did. Again, this can be difficult to comprehend, especially when our lot in life has been full of pain—especially pain inflicted by others—and hopefully at another time we can look into this very important subject.

By the way, although casting lots is mentioned seven times in the New Testament, it ceases to be mentioned after Acts 2. It ceases to be mentioned after the coming of the Holy Spirit. In other words, once believers have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, casting lots is no longer used as a method for making decisions. Consequently, the elders at PBC don’t flip a coin when deciding matters (contrary to what it might sometimes appear!).

The main observation I would like to make about the division and settling of the land has to do with the tribe of Levi—the priestly tribe—which received no land. According to Deuteronomy 18, the Lord, not the land, was to be their portion. As Moses had told them years earlier:

Deuteronomy 18:1-2:

“The priests who are Levites—indeed the whole tribe of Levi—are to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel. They shall live on the offerings made to the Lord by fire, for that is their inheritance. They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them.”

Obviously, the Levites, who numbered 23,000 men according to Numbers 26:62, needed a place to live and to raise their families. Consequently, they were allowed to occupy 48 cities—cities scattered throughout the entire

country. They were allowed to dwell in these cities and to use the surrounding pasturelands, even though they didn’t officially own them. There was to be a priestly presence in every part of the country, instructing the nation in the ways of God. Representatives of God were to live throughout the country, so that every Israelite could hear about the Lord.

Similarly, as Christians, we are a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), whom God has scattered like salt throughout the cities, states, and nations of the globe. We have no lasting inheritance in this present world. We are strangers and pilgrims. And yet, we have the high priestly calling of making God’s ways known to humanity, seeking to be vessels through whom God can reveal himself to a lost, broken, and hurting world. That is our calling. That is our portion.

As we begin to settle into the lives God has called us to live, we will increasingly find God using us to minister to those around us. He works within us, but his intention is also to work through us. As we become more and more settled in our relationship with the Lord—as we become more and more mature in our faith—we will discover that we become less preoccupied with self and more occupied with others. We will increasingly live outside of ourselves, preferring instead to bless those whom God has brought into our lives.

Furthermore, in terms of personal application, there should be a godly presence in every area—in every aspect—of our individual lives. For example, if we think in compartmentalized terms, one compartment of our life might have to do with family, another with work, another with recreation, another with friends and neighbors, and so on. There should be a godly presence in each of these areas. God should be present in our family life and present in our work life. God should be present in our recreational life and present in our community life. Sadly, some Christians seem to imagine that Jesus should only be present in the ‘church compartment’ but not in the others. With Israel, God wanted to be represented—wanted to be present—throughout the entire nation, and he wants to be represented throughout our entire lives as well.

Now, among the 48 Levite cities, there were six special cities known as cities of refuge. Three cities of refuge were located in the Israelite territories on the eastern side of the Jordan River—one city in the north, one in the middle, and one in the south. Three cities of refuge were located on the western side of the Jordan—one city in the north, one in the middle, and one in the south. In effect, the cities of refuge were located in such a way that at least one city of refuge was within a day’s journey of any place in Israel (a nation about the size of Maryland).

Joshua 20:1-6:

Then the Lord said to Joshua: “Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses, so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood.

“Whenever he flees to one of these cities, he is to stand at the entrance to the city gate and state his case before the elders of the city. Then they are to admit him into their city and give him a place to live among them. If the avenger of blood pursues him, they must not surrender the one accused, because he killed his neighbor unintentionally and without malice aforethought. He is to stay in the city until he has stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at the time. Then he may go back to his own home in the town from which he fled.”

Essentially, the idea was this: in Israel, when a crime was committed, there was no police force or FBI to track criminals down and bring them to justice. Instead, it was left up to the individual families to find criminals and execute justice. This was part of the responsibility of what was known as ‘the avenger of blood’—the *goel*, the kinsman-redeemer (a concept we will learn much more about when we come to the book of Ruth). The *goel* was to bring about justice and to provide for needy relatives.

However, the concern was, if someone was killed accidentally or unintentionally, the angered relatives, led by the avenger of blood, might track down the killer and execute him or her, even though no capital crime had been committed. In Deuteronomy 19:5-7, there is an example of a person who accidentally killed someone when their ax-head flew off the handle while chopping wood. In Numbers 35:22-25, there is an example of a person who shoved a man down, killing him, even though there was no intent to kill. These kinds of accidental or unintentional killings were not deserving of the death penalty, but the enraged avenger of blood might seek to execute the person nonetheless.

In such cases, the individual who caused the death was supposed to flee to one of the cities of refuge—to one of the cities where he or she could be protected from the avenger of blood and other enraged family members. The individual was to remain in the city until the death of the high priest, which essentially amounted to an indeterminate sentence. Perhaps the high priest would die a day after the person arrived in the city; perhaps

the high priest wouldn’t die for another thirty years. The consequence for having caused a death was ultimately left up to the Lord—left up to the One who knew when the high priest would die.

There is of course a great deal that could be said about this. However, in terms of personal application—in terms of settling into the lives God has given us—let me make just a few observations. First, as we settle in the land—as we settle into the lives God has called us to live—we need to understand that God himself is our city of refuge. As it says in Psalm 46, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). When we’re in trouble, we need to run to God. We need to run to Jesus. He is the one who will provide us with the safety and help that we need. Indeed, in some sense, I would suggest that we’re always in trouble in one way or another (although we might sometimes imagine that we’re not!). Which is to say ... at the core of our being, we should always be running to God, knowing that he is our city of refuge and our one true home.

Second, Jesus is also our high priest (Hebrews 4:14)—a high priest who will never die. Since those who ran into a city of refuge were to remain there until the high priest died, and since our high priest will never die, we should see ourselves as permanent ‘city of refuge dwellers.’ Once we’ve come to Christ, we should never leave. Our lasting and eternal home is within the protective walls of God’s city, within the protective walls of our relationship with him.

And third, Jesus is also our kinsman-redeemer, our avenger of blood, our *goel*. The cities of refuge were established to protect the innocent, not the guilty. They were established to save the innocent from the wrath of the avenger of blood. However, as Christians, the irony—the blessed irony—is that the avenger of blood has shed his own blood in order that we might be innocent. Jesus, our kinsman-redeemer, died so that we might be redeemed. We who have placed our faith in Christ can enter into the city of refuge as those who are truly innocent. As it says in Romans 5:9, “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!”

Jesus is our city of refuge, Jesus is our high priest, and Jesus is our kinsman-redeemer. If we can begin to grasp those things, then we will begin to understand what it means to have settled in the land. We will begin to understand what it means to have found our true home. We will begin to understand that ‘being at home’ really only comes from the deeply satisfying sense of life that originates from a relationship with our Creator, the source of all life. As it says in Psalm 90:1, “Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.”

As Christians, we long for heaven. We long for our eternal dwelling place—the place Jesus is preparing for us and where we can be with him forever. We see now in a glass darkly, but later face to face. And yet, even now, in this present world, Christ has already come to dwell in our hearts by faith. Once we know this—once we understand that home is where the heart is and that Christ has already made his home in our hearts—we’ll never find ourselves singing the words “Sometimes I wonder if I’m ever gonna make it home again.” We’ll begin to realize that we’re already home—already in a relationship with the one who loves us—and that we’re simply awaiting a fuller and richer understanding of what that truly means.

Joshua’s Farewell Address

After recounting how the Israelites entered, conquered, and settled in the Promised Land, the final two chapters of Joshua—chapters 23 and 24—are Joshua’s farewell address. They are Joshua’s final words before his death at the age of 110. The words are partly exhortation and partly warning. He exhorts the Israelites to continue following God, and he warns them not to turn away from God. They’ve settled in the land, but that’s not the end of the story. They need to continue moving forward in faith.

Without question, the best-known verses from Joshua’s farewell address are these:

Joshua 24:15:

“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. As for me and my home, we will serve the Lord. That’s the choice Joshua placed before the Israelites, and that’s the choice God places before each of us. Are you and I—are we—going to serve God or not? Are we going to continue moving forward in faith or begin shrinking back in fear? Are we going to continue serving the God who will give us everything that we need or are we going to begin serving the gods of this world—gods who can give us nothing of any lasting value? If we serve God, then there will be giants

and fortified cities; there will be battles and obstacles. Thankfully, there will also be great victories and a sense of entering, conquering, and settling the Promised Land—a land full of milk and honey. However, if we choose to serve other gods, it will only end in disaster. As Paul tells us in Galatians, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. A man who sows to please his sinful nature will reap destruction” (Galatians 6:7-8a).

Sadly, as we will see next week when Scott teaches on the book of Judges, it didn’t take the Israelites long to get off track. It didn’t take long for them to stop serving God and to begin ‘sowing to please their sinful nature.’ Within a generation, the result was disastrous. If you want to find out exactly how the story unfolds, well ... you’ll need to come back next Sunday!

Let’s pray. God, may you help us all to move forward in faith—in our individual lives, in our families, in our congregation, and as part of the larger body of Christ. Help us to enter into those areas you’re calling us to enter, help us to conquer those giants and fortified cities you’re calling us to conquer, and help us to settle into the lives you’re calling us to live. Help us to be truly at home and settled in our relationship with you, knowing that you are the only One who can give us the life and the home we’ve always longed for.