

“I WILL GIVE YOU EVERY PLACE YOU SET YOUR FOOT”**JOSHUA 1**

Did you hear about the city guy who bought a farm and several milk cows? One day at a local feed store, he complained that his best cow had gone dry. “Are you feeding her right?” asked the store owner. “Well, I’m feeding her what you’ve been selling me,” the man answered. “Are you milking her every day?” was the next question. “Just about,” replied the novice farmer. “If I need eight ounces of milk for breakfast, I go out and get it. If I don’t need any, I don’t get it. I just let her save it up!” The store owner had to patiently explain to the man that it doesn’t work that way when it comes to milking cows. You have to take all the milk that’s there, when the cow’s ready to give it, or you’ll eventually have nothing at all.

Believe it or not, there’s a life principle in there. It’s one thing to have a job; it’s another to show up and perform well at your job. It’s one thing to take courses at college; it’s another to get your degree. It’s one thing to be engaged; it’s another to walk down the aisle after the ceremony as husband and wife. It’s one thing to have great potential in some area of life – music, the arts, academics, athletics; it’s quite another to achieve that potential. What is given must be gotten. Take all there is or risk losing it.

Believe it or not, right there’s a spiritual principle. God grants everyone the opportunity to know Him personally through His Son, Jesus, but most people never receive His gift. God gives every follower of Jesus the gift of the Holy Spirit, but many of us never get around to living a Spirit-filled life consistently. Jesus offers us abundant life, but we can settle for spiritual poverty. Sometimes I think we can be like that novice farmer thinking we can ask God for His presence and power in little eight ounce doses at our personal convenience only to find out that He doesn’t operate like that.

This morning I begin a new series of messages on the Old Testament book of Joshua entitled “Get What You’ve Been Given.” The book of Joshua tells the great story of how the people of God in the Old Testament – the Israelites – conquered and inhabited the land of Canaan – roughly the present day country of Israel – some 3500 years ago. Embedded in this story are numerous spiritual principles that help us understand that what God gives, you must take. What God gives, you must get or receive. And you must take all that God has to give or risk losing it. Let’s read our text for today and think about it together. What God gives, you must get. How do you do that? Let me suggest three answers from the experience of Joshua and the people of Israel.

TAKE EXPERIENTIALLY WHAT GOD GIVES.

God had given the land of Canaan to the Jewish people through their ancestor, Abraham, but it still had to be possessed, claimed, taken and gotten. That’s why God says to Joshua, “I will give you every place you set your foot...” (Josh 1:3 NIV) It’s as if God says, “Joshua, all this land before you – every mountain, valley, forest, river, city and town – belongs to you and My people. But it won’t become yours fully until you set your foot in every place and take it fully in My Name.” The Jewish people had to turn ownership by promise into actual possession. They had to march into the land, kick out or kill the inhabitants, drink the water, farm the land, and live in the houses God

provided. They had to take and live what God had given experientially. Here's what fascinates me. They got as much as they wanted. If they obeyed God and stepped out in faith, the Israelites would receive all of the land. But if they became satisfied with something less than what God intended to give them and settle for it, that's what they'd end up with. In fact, that is the tragedy of this story. History reveals that the Israelites never fully occupied Canaan until some 400 years later when King David finally and completely subdued the entire country. They got what they wanted, but it was less than what God wanted to give them!

Do you see a spiritual principle right there? God loves every person with an everlasting love, but has every person acknowledged that love by becoming a follower of Jesus? Of course not! You have to take what God gives or risk losing it. As a follower of Jesus, God has given you the opportunity to experience a growing relationship with Himself. The Bible even says that God has "... blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ." (Eph 1:3 NLT) It's as if God has given you this spiritual gift card with an unlimited amount of cash on it and your name printed on it with raised letters. What did Jesus say? "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10 NIV) When? Right now. You must take experientially what God gives. You will get as much as you really want when it comes to God and the things of God. No, it doesn't take personal effort to become a follower of Jesus. You simply reach out and receive by faith the gift God gives. But to become fully all that God desires you to be as His child – now, that does demand a ton of effort on your part. Yes, to be sure, the Holy Spirit helps you and all of that. But you have to want it, take it and get it. God said through His prophet, Jeremiah, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jer 29:13 NIV). God does indeed offer you a life of incredible spiritual richness and usefulness, but you have to want it. The question is not God's ability to give, but your desire and willingness to go after it. You have to take it. You have to get it. "I will give you every place you set your foot."

Come to think of it, this is a spiritual principle that applies to a local church like ours. Every genuine church possesses incredible spiritual potential in the community where God has placed it. But churches – like individuals – get as much of God's blessing as they really want. Like the Israelites, church people have to step out and obey. I've spoken to you often about the need to become a turnaround church. Will we rise to the challenge of penetrating a demographically changing Northland with the good news of Jesus? Will we find ways – even new, risky ways - to ask men, women, boys and girls to surrender to Jesus and become His followers? Will we come alongside those new followers of Jesus and help them become fully devoted followers of Jesus? The question is not God's ability to turn a church around; it's our willingness to be turned around by the Holy Spirit of God. "I will give you every place you set your foot." How do you get fully what God gives? Here's a second answer to that question.

TAKE MILITANTLY WHAT GOD GIVES.

Why "militantly"? What's that about? The Bible says you and I are always in a very real spiritual war going on all the time all around us in different ways. That was literally true of Joshua and the Israelites. They faced formidable obstacles and enemies on the

other side of the Jordan River: strong, walled cities, experienced fighting men, and people who had no intention of giving up what they had without a battle. That's why three times God says to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous.... Be strong and very courageous.... This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (Josh 1:6,7,9 NLT). Even the Israelites themselves say to Joshua, "...So be strong and courageous!" (Josh 1:18 NLT) Is anyone sensing a theme here? Why? Precisely because there was a lot of scary stuff on the other side of the Jordan that might just make Joshua feel overwhelmed, weak and discouraged. Yes, the land of Canaan had been given, but it had to be won. As a result, Joshua and the Israelites had to anticipate a fight and expect a miracle. Israel had to fight – and fight hard – for every acre of ground in Canaan. Yes, God assured victory if they did it God's way, but the people still had to fight. It was as if God said, "I'll give you every place you set your foot, but in order to get it, you're going to have to fight for it and you much expect a miracle from Me."

Does anyone see a spiritual principle right there? You and I must live every day anticipating a fight and expecting a miracle. God has given you unlimited spiritual blessings, but you still have to get them. They don't just come to you automatically. And you, too, will face formidable obstacles and enemies that will challenge your courage and determination. You have three primary enemies: your own sinful nature, the powerful influence of the world's values itself, and the devil himself. Of course, God will help you do what He wants, but He will not do it for you. Will God help you strengthen a shaky marriage? Yes, but He won't do the work for you. Will God help you raise your kids in the knowledge of the Lord? Yes, but He won't do the work for you. Will God enable you to get out of debt and become financially healthy? Yes, but He won't do the work for you. Will God open doors for you to share your faith with a neighbor or a lost family member? Yes, but He won't do it for you. Real faith is not expecting God to do it all. Nor is real faith trying to do everything in your own strength. Real faith is stepping out in faith and working and fighting for what God wants to give. For God's sake – I don't say that either flippantly or irreverently – you gotta fight!

Some years ago now a reward of \$5,000 was offered for every wolf captured alive in a certain geographical area of our country. Two men, Sam and Jed, were fortune hunters. Day and night they scoured the mountains looking for wolves. One night, totally exhausted, they fell asleep at their campsite dreaming of a big pay day. Suddenly, Sam woke up and saw that he and Jed were surrounded by about fifty wolves with hungry eyes and barred teeth. He nudged his friend's sleeping head and said, "Jed, wake up! We're rich!" I like Sam's attitude!

Becoming all that the Lord wants you to become can appear impossible at times, but God promises to do the miraculous in you and through you if you will fight in His strength. You will need to fight against your own sinful nature. You will need to fight against the world's values and attitudes that can discourage and overwhelm you. You will need to learn how to put on the spiritual armor of God and fight against the devil, too. God says to you and me, "Child, I'll give you every place you set your foot, but you are going to have to fight and you're going to have to expect Me to do the miraculous."

Again, this principles applies to this and any local church. God has blessed this church lavishly. And I believe God wants to continue to bless this church and use it for His glory now and in the future. But like the Israelites, we have to anticipate a fight and expect a miracle. We have a “country” to go in and possess, too. That “country” is a new, wider and more significant ministry than we have at present. I believe it involves reaching more people for Jesus primarily right here in the Northland community and seeing them transformed by God’s power and grace. Yes, we need a turnaround at present; we need to experience revitalization as a congregation. Do you think that will happen without a fight? Do you think the devil will allow that to happen without throwing every weapon in his arsenal at us? Like the Israelites, we have to anticipate a fight and expect a miracle. Our church faces some very real external “enemies”, so to speak – things like the changing demographics of the Northland community and a wider culture that sees less and less relevance of this church – or any church - to one’s everyday life.

Every church faces some very real internal enemies, too. We can be afraid of change. The older I get the more I realize I don’t like change as much as I thought I did. Change is hard, but for this church to become all that the Lord wants us to become, we will have to change. We can’t go back and recapture the past. Let’s be willing to do anything that’s effective even if its new and different. Let’s be willing to take some risks. Let’s be willing to make any change that advances God’s Kingdom – that brings more men, women, boys and girls in Northland and beyond into God’s forever family. Another internal enemy is just apathy toward God or lack of interest in His mission. The NBA basketball playoffs are going on right now. Years ago, Frank Leyden, the then coach of the Utah Jazz was having a really hard time motivating one of his young players. Finally, he said to him in exasperation, “Son, I don’t understand it with you. Is it ignorance or apathy?” The player shrugged and replied, “Coach, I don’t know and I don’t care.” That kind of attitude short circuits a personal walk with God as well as this or any church’s usefulness to the Lord quicker than anything else. I believe God is saying to us as a church, “I will give you every place you set your foot, KRBC, but you’re going to have to fight for it and expect a miracle from Me.” How do you get fully what God gives? Here’s a third answer to that question.

TAKE GRADUALLY WHAT GOD GIVES.

Forty years before the events recorded in Joshua 1, God said something very significant to Joshua’s predecessor, Moses, about the conquest of Canaan. “Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.” (Ex 23:30 NIV) God was referring to the people already living in Canaan. “Little by little” – here a city, there a village, here a town, there a community – would become the possession of God’s people. God’s didn’t expect His people to claim all of Canaan in just one brief, glorious military campaign. It was to be a gradual, persistent, and progressive conquest of the land promised and given to them – “little by little.” Why was that? I believe God set it up that way so that the people would have to keep on trusting Him for every square inch of the land and for every victory. It was as if He said, “I will give you every place you set your foot... little by little.”

Do you see the spiritual principle right there? No follower of Jesus ever started out as a spiritual adult. It takes time to become the person God wants you to become. In fact, this side of Heaven, you'll never stop maturing, growing and developing spiritually. It's easy to get discouraged if you forget this principle. For instance, you hear a message on the fruit of the Spirit – those character traits produced in you through the Holy Spirit – like love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faith, kindness, gentleness and self-control and you might just want to throw up your hands in despair. “Lord, I’ll never be what You want me to be!” It’s little by little, my friend. Or, perhaps you want God to use you more to share the good news about Jesus with others and help others grow in their faith. But, today, you see few results from your prayers or efforts. Keep trying. Keep surrendering to the Lord. Keep fighting. Keep expecting a miracle. Do I ever get discouraged about my own slow progress in the things of God? Do I ever feel ineffective for the Lord? Of course, I do! Maybe that’s why this is one of my favorite Bible verses: “And I am certain that God, who began a good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.” (Phil 1:6 NLT) God will finish what He starts in you and me. “I will give you every place you set your foot... little by little.”

The same principle applies to this church. Most of the time, a church turnaround is gradual. Spiritual revitalization is gradual. It usually doesn't happen quickly or in one blazing, glorious moment. Yes, it does seem to me at times that it can be agonizingly slow, but that “little by little” principle applies here as well. Let's keep doing, as a congregation, what God puts before us to do and trust Him for the results. On the one hand, let's be passionate and aggressive about the Lord's mission. Let's get after everything we can and should get after! There's no place for complacency or for apathy. On the other hand, let's be patient and prayerful remembering at all times that God has His timing. “I will give you every place you set your foot, KRBC, little by little.”

During the darkest hours of World War 2, Britain faced a critical shortage of silver for its war industries. When Prime Minister Winston Churchill was informed of the crisis, he asked if there were any other possible sources of silver no matter how unlikely. Someone came back with the following observation. Throughout the United Kingdom there were many churches, cathedrals and abbeys that housed many beautiful statues of Christian saints made out of sterling silver. Known for his wit, Churchill made this memorable and now famous reply, “Well, it's time to put the saints in circulation!” And so they did.

If you're a follower of Jesus, the Bible says you're already a saint. The biblical definition of a saint is simply a person set apart for God and the things of God. Every child of God qualifies under that definition. If you've already been put into circulation – you're out there available to God every day to be His person working to achieve His mission – God bless you! But if you refuse to be put into circulation – you're just content to be and to do nothing for the Lord – I'm going to pray that the Holy Spirit makes you miserable! I'm going to pray that He fills you with a holy passion to get what you've been given. May you, and I and all of God's people hear the word of the Lord again today: “I will give you every place you set your foot.”