

TIME IN THE TENT

by Kim Butts

“Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent” (Exodus 33:11).

It is always amazing and such a blessing to read over a passage of scripture and see something I have never observed previously. Meditating on the word gives God an opportunity to hit the pause button and make me take notice of something that challenges and encourages me. I have read the account of Moses and the Tent of Meeting in Exodus 33 countless times... but today when I read it, I gravitated toward the last part of verse 11: “When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.”

It was as if I suddenly felt God urging me to pay attention to Joshua in the midst of a passage talking about the intimate relationship between God and Moses... which is the relationship I have always focused on in the past. So, I decided to sit with this verse for a season. I found myself asking many hypothetical questions. Why did Moses take Joshua with him to the Tent? Did Joshua actually go *into* the tent, as implied in the wording of the Scripture, or was he sitting just outside as most servants would likely do? Was Joshua able to hear the conversations between God and Moses? Certainly he would have, whether he was inside or just outside. Why would Joshua, who was the servant of Moses, not accompany Moses back to the camp? How long did he stay at the Tent of Meeting before returning to the service of Moses? And, why didn't Moses seem to care that Joshua stayed behind? Did Moses instruct him to stay there? We don't have the answers to those questions specifically, but recognizing that Joshua the servant was also the protégé, mentee and ultimate successor of Moses, his “extra” time in the Tent seems to have even greater significance.

Not only did Joshua stay in the Tent, but scripture says he “would not depart” from it... in other words, he *refused* to leave. Was this time in the presence of God preparation and on the job training for Joshua's soon to be leadership position, even though he didn't really know all that God had in mind at the time? Perhaps Joshua was simply spending time in God's presence to know Him better because the beauty and majesty of God was so compelling that this young leader couldn't resist soaking and worshipping the One who had obviously captivated his heart.

It seems to me that God has His eye upon Joshua because of the purity and sincerity of his devotion and his commitment to obedience. He had been one of the twelve spies charged with checking out the land flowing with milk and honey. Joshua had found favor with God and with Moses for having courage, along with Caleb, to speak out to the rebellious and fearful Israelites that if the Lord was pleased with them, He would make a way for them to enter the Promised Land. Even though the task seemed daunting because of the fierce tribes who lived there, Joshua believed God's promise and that He would give His people what they needed to succeed.

We see God's plan unfold when Moses had, in a brief moment of prideful disobedience, forfeited his privilege of entering the Promised Land. As a result, in Numbers 27:18-20 the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hands on him; and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. You shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey him." It would be Joshua who would now lead the people into the Promised Land.

Later, after the death of Moses, God reveals His specific plans to Joshua. We do not have any scriptural proof that God actually spoke to Joshua until after the death of Moses, when He commanded Joshua to cross the Jordan. However, it is my feeling that Joshua knew the Lord's voice well, for he had spent time in the Tent of Meeting, soaking in the presence of God. When God gave Joshua his instructions, He also encouraged him: "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:5-9).

Here are my takeaways:

- A godly leader spends time in the Tent of Meeting, refusing to leave. If one remains in the place of prayer, intent on being in intimate fellowship with God, one will be better prepared to answer the call of God to step into His kingdom

- purposes when the time is right. The place of prayer for Joshua was first and foremost the place of God's presence... but it was also a place of preparation which ultimately led to greater things than Joshua ever could have imagined.
- A godly leader accepts that mantle as a humble, obedient servant. Joshua could have boasted about his position as Moses' right hand man, yet he was more interested in spending time with God in the Tent of Meeting than touting his own influence and importance before others. He had leadership qualities, but placed his dependence upon God alone.
 - A godly leader believes and trusts God wholeheartedly. Joshua trusted the promise of God and was not afraid to voice his confidence to the people of Israel when they expressed their fear and anxiety to Moses about the fierce tribes standing in their way. He was one of only two of the twelve spies who trusted that God could overcome the seemingly insurmountable obstacles.
 - A godly leader is chosen and equipped for God's tasks. God was pleased to pour out His Spirit upon Joshua, His chosen successor to Moses. Joshua was specifically anointed and commissioned for his leadership role.
 - A godly leader waits patiently for God's timing and is fully prepared when the time comes. Joshua was being positioned by God to take the people of Israel into the Promised Land... something Moses had lost the privilege of doing due to his own disobedience. Joshua didn't rush the process, but patiently waited for God's plans to play out at the appointed time.

Have you been lingering in the "tent" with God? Most of us would admit to being pulled in many different directions, even though we no longer have to go to a physical tent to meet with the Father. God has made it possible to meet with Him in any given moment because He has made His home with us. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are now the dwelling place of God. And just like Joshua, we do not need to be afraid because God will not fail us if we will be "strong and courageous."

So – after all of this I have one more takeaway: I need to spend more time in the Tent.

1. Recognize God brought us here.

For 40 years, God had led the Israelites through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud and fire. Now, right when the Jordan was at its highest and most treacherous level, God led the Israelites to cross it. Wouldn't it have been easier for Israel to ford when the Jordan was a sleepy ribbon of water? **Yes, but they would have missed the miracle.** God leads us with "cords of kindness" to overwhelming circumstances precisely to show us His glory.

2. Remember God's promises.

Before God ever perched Israel in front of the Jordan, He reminded Joshua: "I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses... As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Joshua 1:3, 5). And this is not just an Old Testament promise to Israel. This promise is equally for us. In Hebrews 13:5, God says, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

3. Obey God's Word.

Along with His promises, God reminded Joshua to obey every bit of God's law. "Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go." (Joshua 1:7) When God told Joshua to be strong and courageous, it wasn't chest-thumping or positive thinking that made him brave. It was knowing that only full obedience to God would bring about their success.

4. Stay in God's Word.

"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night..." (Joshua 1:8) When we're facing overwhelming circumstances, we must saturate ourselves with the Word. Facebook memes will never give us the meat we need to face our situation with faith. Daily time in the Bible helps us know Who God is and how to align our life to Him.

5. Keep our focus on God.

As the Israelites prepared to cross, they were instructed to watch for the Ark of the covenant and follow it. "Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before." (Joshua 3:4) The Ark encompassed the very Presence of God. We will lose heart and lose faith every time if we focus on the floodwaters around us. We must keep our mind on God's truth and open our eyes for His leading hand. Martin Luther said, "I know not the way He leads me, but well do I know my Guide."

6. Get our feet wet.

Joshua records that "as soon as their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing." (Joshua 3:15-16) God did not part the Jordan as they camped on the bank. The miracle only happened once they stepped into the water. God delivers as we step out in faith with Him.

7. Make a memorial.

God directed Joshua to take 12 stones from the dry sand of the Jordan riverbed and set them up as a memorial, to forever remind all succeeding generations of God's miracle. What a faith-booster every time they faced a new, difficult task! We too need memorials. Mine are usually recorded in my journal or Bible and marked with a date and details of how God worked. What a faith boost every single time I re-read those and am reminded that God who delivered me in the past will deliver me again.

Listen, none of us wants to face the impossible. But if God leads us to it, He will surely lead us through it. May these 7 lessons help us grow our faith when we come to our next Jordan.