

Dr. Joe Jursa's Sermon

[The Lord is with you!](#) - Joshua 1:9

We have survived and thrived through Avalanche Ranch. Each day we learned new scripture that continually reminded us that God is with us. My favorite was the scripture from Joshua.

I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

The cornerstone of the people of faith has always been a deep sense, in good or hard times that God is present. It is the weekend of your wedding, the birth of your first child or grandchild – God is present. You lay waiting for the surgeon and the needed operation, your favorite dog dies or you are mourning the loss of your job – God is present.

The hardest statement I believe I heard in the life of Jesus are those words on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” For all of his life, Jesus has known that God was present with him. Here in the closing moments for the first time Jesus experiences what many of us have experienced, the uncertainty of the presence of God. Jesus is unable to reach out and touch God. He has no feeling or certainty in his life that God is there. He is like a blind man calling out, are you there.

How often have we called out to God uncertain that God is there? Why should our church have taken a whole week reminding our children and us that God is present? The simple answer is that almost all of us will at some time come to forget about or be uncertain of God's presence. Times will become so easy and we will become distracted and forget about God. It will not be that we don't believe, we just forget about God altogether. We would not argue there is no God. We would not stand to testify of our belief in God. We have simply forgotten about God altogether.

Or for some of us in may happen when life becomes hard, the way uncertain and the shadows deep and dark. We will call out, but we will not hear the sound of God's voice or know God's reassuring presence. My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? They will not just be Jesus words but the thoughts of our hearts as well. Where is God, what has become of God and what will become of me?

Joshua says when we come to these days, I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

Hold on, don't quit, and don't give in. Jesus came through. There is blessed relationship upon the other side of today ordeal. Will such thinking make the trouble go away? No. Will such thinking make you feel better? Who knows? Will it make the ordeal end quicker? Probably not.

But Joshua wants to remind you of the truth that God is still present with you. God may be beyond your vision, but a lot in life is beyond our vision. Before you knew or cared for God, God provided for all that you have had in life and all that you will need the rest of your life. Before you were aware that you and God were separated by sin in your life, God had already provided Jesus to atone, to pay the price for your sin. God has been so desirous of a relationship with you that before you ever thought about God, God had already planned and completed everything necessary for a good relationship between you and God.

Harold Tatch was a Quaker who attended my first congregation. He worked his closing year with the phone company in Orlando because his father was over 90 years old and though still living alone was

beginning to have health issues. Some years after his father passed away, Harold also died. Inelle, his wife had never written a check, she had never paid a bill. She did not know how to balance a check book. She had no idea if they owed money on the house or if the mortgage was paid in full. She had never been to the safety deposit box except the first time they went to the bank and her name was placed on everything.

Inelle wanted to be a wife and mother. She taught her family, led a ladies bible study group, and sang in the choir. But in many ways she was the epitome of women before women's liberation. She expected her husband to deal with everything in the world; she would handle the home, children and keep track of relationships. When Harold died her sons and I were particularly worried about how she would handle the finances.

But Harold loved her beyond his death. He had planned for years what would happen to her if he were to die first. He had created an extensive notebook, one of those school notebooks with dividers for each subject. Every credit card was paid off as well as the mortgage by a life insurance policy that he had already delivered to the funeral home so they could file upon his death. A close family friend at the bank would balance her check book each month for her. Everything was automatic pay where ever possible, home owners insurance, auto insurance. Harold had established a trust so that ordinary bills like water and electric would be paid by the trustee at the bank.

The notebook informed her of every penny he had invested with brokers, the size of the bank accounts, a complete list of every item in the safety deposit box. And to me the most amazing thing of all was the first chapter in her notebook.

There in the opening pages was a short note telling of his love for her but also a list of final instructions. She was given the names and numbers of every person he had dealt with for every piece of financial information. With their names and numbers was what questions she could ask each one, what they could help her with when she had questions. Every repair person she would need for auto, appliance, home repairs virtually every conceivable thing that might need fixing down to the garden sprinklers. He even told her which of their children would be good at helping with certain areas of her life.

And the final pages of the notebook were instructions for his oldest child about the arrangements he had already made for her death, with funeral home, and gravesite next to his.

She didn't know what she was going to need, but Harold who loved her provided everything he could because of his deep love for her. When I visited with the son several months after, we talked about his father's notebook for mom. I had told him that I had not noticed much of a change in her life except her missing of him. He commented that his father had done such a good job in preparing everything that her life had not changed except for missing him. Harold had taken care of virtually everything, all Inelle had to do was just keep living life as she had before his death.

Not many husbands or spouses are like Harold and Inelle. But God is even better. While Harold got most of things right and certainly made Inelle's life better because of his planning, he was still gone. God is always with us.

I have remembered a line from a John Wayne movie since I was a kid. Mr. Pepper his side kick says something about no law and no God west of the Pecos, to which he replies, "People create laws everywhere they go and sooner or later, Mr. Pepper, they realize that God has already been there."

Where ever you are, God has already been there and was ready for your coming. You are not alone, forsaken, forgotten or abandoned. You have not walked beyond God's arms or out of where God can stand beside you.

Joshua reminds us, **Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.**