

Money-Back Guarantee Joshua 1:1-9 (ZCC 7/28/13)

1 Now after the death of Moses the servant of Yahweh, Yahweh spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go across this Jordan, you, and all these people, to the land which I am giving to them, even to the children of Israel. 3 I have given you every place that the sole of your foot will tread on, as I told Moses. 4 From the wilderness, and this Lebanon, even to the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your border. 5 No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you nor forsake you. 6 "Be strong and courageous; for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous. Be careful to observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded you. Don't turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8 This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. 9 Haven't I commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid. Don't be dismayed, for Yahweh your God† is with you wherever you go." (World English Bible)*

Let's do some imagining. Close your eyes or just clear your head and imagine with me. You are sitting at home in your favorite chair watching TV--with a diet Coke in one hand and a family-size package of peanut M&M's in the other. Your TV show fades to black and as it comes back up, an announcer screams out, "Only \$29.99 starts you on our guaranteed weight-loss program..."

The picture fades in and on the screen is a young woman in a tight swim suit taking about how she lost 250 pounds in just three days or something like that. Then surely enough there is a picture that pops up of someone who couldn't possibly be her (or could it?)

The announcer proceeds to tell you where to order "...NOT ONE BUT TWO BOTTLES..." of this miracle pill for only \$29.99 plus \$59.99 shipping and handling. All the while, there is a little disclaimer crawl running across the bottom—so small that you can barely see it. "Dramatization by professional actors, actual results may vary—average weight losses are much lower..."

If you don't get the results you want, they will be glad to send your money back—just send the pills back at your own expense and of course the \$59.99 shipping and handling is not refundable.

We want our spot remover to remove our spots and we want our toasters to toast and we want our cars to run—they say the products we buy are guaranteed, but they really aren't.

It seems there are always limits to guarantees—some fine print. In fact, what we normally get are not really guarantees at all, they are limited warranties and there is a real difference. What that means is that when something goes wrong—and it will—they will fix the old one or give you a new one.

The whole world wants guarantees for our products and yet there are very few sure things in this world.

You might remember a family reunion where old uncle George (or Ralph or Bill) was waving a stinky cigar around and laughing as he said, "nothing is certain in this world except death and taxes..."

We've all seen how uncertainty can affect our lives in every area—we have even seen people fail when they are attempting to do the work of God. Churches themselves even fail and are sold or torn down. We've seen others fail and it may be that sometimes, in the dark of the night when no one is around, we are afraid the we will fail too. There are, after all, no guarantees for success—or are there?

In our reading from Joshua 1, there is the outline of a plan of action for God's people. The new leader of the Israelites was told to march them into the land of Canaan and take it—a land given to them by God. God outlined the specific steps they were to take...all they had to do was follow the plan God gave them and they would be successful. NOT a limited warranty, but an honest-to-God guarantee...

By looking closely at Joshua 1:1-9 we can find God's plan for the Israelites—God's plan in four steps. Even better, I also believe that if we take that plan and bring it forward to our times and circumstances—still faithfully following those steps, we can also have our success guaranteed by God.

In Numbers 27:16-23 God appointed Joshua as the new leader of the Israelites—that was a specific call. But now we see that God is calling Joshua to take the land—a very specific task.

Imagine you are a firefighter, sitting at the station, eating dinner. The alarm goes off and the dispatcher is on the radio saying that there might be a fire or something like that somewhere near Montpelier. Would that be helpful? Not really, would it. In order to go put out a fire, you would need to know first of all if it was a brush fire or a structure fire or a vehicle fire—and more importantly, where the fire is located.

If we are going to be successful doing Gods work, the first thing we need is a specific call from God. All churches and all Christians are called to serve God—but that isn't what I'm talking about. We are also called individually and corporately to specific tasks. You may be called to be a worship leader or a sunday school teacher—someone else may have an entireley different calling. One church may be called to reach out to a local college or to meet the needs of the homeless—another church may be called to meet the needs of orphans or those who have lost someone to cancer.

God made Joshua's job clear—he was given a task to do for God's glory.

As a Christian, I had a general “do God's work” call for most of my life—and sometimes I had specific callings such as teaching or going on a mission trip. When I was in my 30's I received a specific call which took me back to college and to seminary and to a church—and then to a Clinical Pastoral Education residency. To be honest with you, I had no clue how to make all that happen—how to pay for school and how to make ends meet and how to “lots of other things. But, God had some clues and fortunately, he clued me in along the way...

When we receive a specific calling, 2nd Corinthians 9:8 says that God will give us “all sufficiency” through his grace. When God gives us a job to do, he provides whatever is necessary to get it done.

The second requirement for success is acting on the call.

In order to lay claim to the promise—the guarantee—Joshua and the people had to act. The Promised Land wasn't going to come to them—they had to go and claim it. They had to act. Verses 2 and 3 say, “Arise and cross this Jordan...” In other words, “if you have faith, put feet on your faith.” Time to ACT.

Let's go back to our imaginary fire station. This time the alarm goes off and the dispatcher comes on the radio and she gives you all the details needed. It is a vehicle fire and she gives you all the information you need to get the fire put out. You tell her that y'all will get right on it, but you and the other firefighters are eating dinner and you decide to finish with your meal and clearing the table and washing the dishes. What kind of firefighters are you?!?! Just getting that specific call wasn't enough was it—what else was needed? [Wait for feedback--”act” or “go” or something].

Just like Joshua and the people of Israel, we are called and called to act on that calling. We are called to step out on faith. It is not enough to know what God wants—to be called—God also requires action. He wants to see those feet moving.

Remember, though, acting on faith is not something we MUST do—in spite of our fear and trembling and uncertainty--it is something we GET to do and we GET to embrace, based on God's history of faithfulness. God doesn't just throw us out there, he says, “look at my record...see how faithful I am.”

Being called and empowered by God is exciting stuff.

God wants us to try him and to prove him. He says to us, “just as I was faithful to Moses and Joshua and Peter and John and Isaiah—I will be faithful to you!” All we have to do is look at the word of God and we will see his faithfulness—to his people and also to himself. I can also look back over my own lifetime and see God's faithfulness to me and to others--and I suspect that you can also. THAT is what he was telling Joshua.

Andrea is almost 21 now, but when she was small, she loved for me to toss her up into the air and catch her. Maybe it was scary at first, I don't know, but I know that as time went on, as I successfully caught her over and over—every time, I might add—she trusted absolutely. She could look back on her history—on my history as a catcher of small girls—and trust the outcome. So it is with God. He doesn't require blind faith because he has already proved his faithfulness in history and in our lives.

Did you notice, though, that in this passage God seems to almost take Joshua by the hand and even sort of figuratively rub him on the back of the neck to calm him down and encourage him? One comforting thing to remember is tht God knows we are human—he made us after all. He knows that we tend to fear and that we tend to think of all the things that might go wrong.. Even after all God had done in Joshua's presence—even after Joshua's history with God, Joshua still needed encouragement. God was not angry, he was gracious.

There were reasons why Joshua needed encouragement. In verse 2 God says to Joshua, “...cross THIS Jordan...” like it was right in front of them. I can imagine Joshua standing on high ground and looking at the river even as God spoke to him. It was the rainy season and maybe the river was in full flood and if that was the case, Joshua wouldn't have liked what he saw.

There has been some pretty impressive flooding in our country this year, but if you think back several years, you probably remember seeing video of the Mississippi River flooding and tearing out levees and wiping out everything in its path. I used to live on the Mississippi and I can tell you that when it floods it is ever more impressive in person. It roars and surges—chocolate brown water with foam and chunks and limbs and all kinds of things in it. Then there are the pieces of wood—parts of roofs and walls and boats—and even whole trees. Where I lived, the bank on the Tennessee side was about a half-mile away, but if you didn't have a bridge, it might as well have been on another planet—because without a bridge, you could never get there. If you tried, you would get swept away.

Joshua may have seen something similar before him. He could remember the Red Sea crossing, but this was worse—way worse! Also, remember that back then Joshua was just a helper. Moses was the chosen one of God. Joshua had seen God work miracles through Moses, but never through him. That's why we hear God say over and over, “Just as I have been with Moses, so shall I be with you...”

Joshua was afraid he would fail. He had seen God in action, but he had also seen the people of Israel in action. He knew they could be stubborn and difficult and that he would have to deal with them. Jewish legend says that when Moses told Joshua that he was going to be the leader in his place—that he was going to be the new leader of the people of Israelites—Joshua fell the ground, laid out flat, and cried like a baby until Moses physically picked him up and reassured him. He had seen the people in action and he was afraid.

The third requirement for our money-back-guarantee is staying within the bounds of the call.

Maybe you've seen a football play where a player receives a kick-off and runs the length of the field—spiking the ball as he crosses the goal-line—only to find that there is a flag on the play. Only to find that he stepped out of bounds WAY BACK on the other end of the field. Does that goal count? No—the go back and begin play where he stepped out of bounds.

In verse 4 there are some very specific instructions and Joshua and the people of Israel were expected to follow those instructions. His hand would strengthen them and make them successful as long as they did what he instructed—so long as they stayed within the bounds of his call for them. God would be faithful, but they were also expected to do their part by being faithful.

God does the same for you and me. I COULD say that since God called me to be a minister—to be a preacher and a pastor—and so therefore he must be OK with me being a music minister also. That would be presumptuous of me and it would be WRONG of me. God didn't call me to lead music and I would prove it, but I don't want to hurt your ears. In order to have our success guaranteed by God, we also must stay within the bounds of God's specific call.

The fourth requirement for guaranteed success is for us to live and act within God's law.

God was very clear in this. He told Joshua that his success depended on his “doing” the law, but he didn't leave it there. He gave Joshua specific instructions on HOW to do the law.

I believe that you and I can apply these specific instructions to our own lives. In fact, this may be the most important thing I say today. Because following these instructions will not only guarantee success in God's specific callings in our lives—but it will also guarantee success in our daily lives, in our Christians living as we walk with God daily.

First, God said Joshua was to KNOW the word of God—to know the law. If he was going to keep from “turning to the right or left” he would have to know the words of the law--to know what it said. Makes sense, doesn't it? If we don't know, we can't follow—so God says to know the word of the Lord.

Second, Joshua was told to meditate on the law—day and night. In this passage, the word translated as “meditate” comes from the Hebrew “hagah” which means to muse or think—or even to mutter. This word literally means to mutter the word of God. Have you ever been in deep thought about something and then suddenly heard yourself answer the questions that were in your mind? Have you replayed and replayed something until you actually spoke your thoughts aloud? Usually for me, it is when I've messed up some way—how about you? That is what “hagah” means. THIS is how we are to study the word—to read it and know it and think about it so much that we wind up muttering it aloud.

How do we DO the law? Read it, know it, and walk around thinking about it. If we DO the law—we will have completed the fourth requirement and our success will be guaranteed just as Joshua's was.

So let me go back through those four requirements for God's money-back guarantee:

[1] Be certain of God's calling. Ask yourself, “What has God told me to do?”

[2] Step out in faith. Say to yourself, “I can trust God—based on my personal experiences and the stories I find in his word. God is faithful.”

[3] Work within the boundaries of his call. Ask yourself along the way, “Am I staying the course?”

[4] DO the law by reading, honoring, and musing on God's word.

Joshua was told over and over that his faithful, lawful actions within the bounds of God's call would result in success. As we read thorough the book of Joshua, we find that God was, indeed, faithful to Joshua, the people of Israel, and to himself. As he took and occupied the Promised Land, no one could stand before Joshua all the days of his life.

You and I, individually and corporately—as Christians and as the people of God in this place—can expect the same faithfulness from God. God's nature does not change. He does not demand blind follow-ship. When we are called, we can look back on God's history of faithfulness and provision. We can walk by faith, but faith rooted in God's power and being and essence.

We are called in a general way. Called to be God's people—to be Christians separately and together in this place. We are also called specifically. We are to constantly seek to determine God's specific calling, to step out in faith as we do that calling—working within the boundaries of that call as we meditate on and DO the word of God. We WILL be successful—God guarantees it...

