


Doomed to Repeat | January 3, 2021

Week 1 | Joshua 1 | “Trust and Obey”

In 1722, the famed English poet Alexander Pope famously wrote, “To err is human, to forgive divine.” And, as all great poets have done throughout the ages, Pope succinctly and creatively explained what he believed to be the distinguishing characteristics between God and human beings: we are, if anything, *faulty*, and God, if anything, is *forgiving*. And while some might argue against this dichotomy—thinking it’s far too simplistic—one cannot help but resonate with Pope’s conclusion. At our core, humans are broken and God alone is the one who puts our pieces back together.

Think back on your own life. We all have moments we’d love to forget; the kind of moments that make you cringe just as much today as it did many years ago; the kind of moments that come to your mind unbidden as you drift off to sleep; the kind of moments that prove you are human. Perhaps you embarrassed yourself in front of a large group of people. Or possibly you made a critical error at work. Or maybe you let your vehicle tags expire, got a ticket, waited too long to pay the ticket, and then got arrested... as I did. 

Now, while errors like my arrest may be memorable, thankfully, they are not regular occurrences. Instead, they stand like a wall barring your way from ever repeating those mistakes again. (*I can assure you, every ticket I’ve received since, has been paid immediately.*) However, most of the errors we make are not one-time occurrences but regular occurrences. They are so oft-repeated that you can almost predict the minute, hour, and day in which they’ll happen. We know they’re wrong. Yet, we continue to do them over and over again without any end in sight. I know what mine are and I’m sure you know what yours are. Isn’t it frustrating to fail at the same thing over and over again?

In fact, repeating the same mistakes is so ingrained in the psyche of the human race that I’m sure, at some point, you’ve asked yourself at least one of these three following questions: “Why do I keep doing this?”, “Are there triggers that cause me to fail in this area?” And, more importantly, “How do I get off this merry-go-round of poor choices?”

These questions, and many like them, will be answered in this new six-week series, ‘Doomed to Repeat.’ The hope is that, as you start this new year, you will not repeat the mistakes of 2020. Instead, you’ll move forward in a much brighter and much better direction. Because, even though we have all made mistakes, sometimes the same mistakes over and over again, we, as Christians, are not doomed to repeat past mistakes. Through Jesus Christ, we can change the patterns of our bad behavior.

But where in the Bible can we look for guidance on how to change our bad behavior? Well, to be quite frank, everywhere. From cover to cover, the Scriptures are filled with examples and principles which help us avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. For instance, the Book of Proverbs has practical tips on how to better yourself, your business, and your family. Anyone truly wishing to make themselves into a better human being need only read a chapter of Proverbs every day for a month.

However, we will not be looking at Proverbs. Instead, we'll be looking at the children of Israel. Specifically, we'll be looking at the portion of their story around the time when they entered the titular "promise land." But instead of working through the narrative forward from the beginning to the end, we'll be working through the narrative backwards from the end to the beginning. In this way, you'll be able to vividly recall how the story ends while we explore some of the pitfalls which occurred on their way. And hopefully, you'll learn to keep your eyes on the finish line and avoid the pitfalls as you go along.

So, let's begin at the end.

READ: Joshua 1:1-9 (ESV)

¹ After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. ⁴ From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory.

⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not 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, 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 good success.

⁹ Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and courageous.** Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is **with you** wherever you go.”

¹⁰ And Joshua commanded the officers of the people, ¹¹ “Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, ‘Prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan to go in to take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.’”

¹² And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh Joshua said, ¹³ “Remember the word that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, ‘The Lord your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land.’ ¹⁴ Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brothers and shall help them, ¹⁵ until the Lord gives rest to your brothers as he has to you, and they also take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and shall possess it, the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise.”

¹⁶ And they answered Joshua, “All that you have commanded us **we will do**, and wherever you send us **we will go**. ¹⁷ Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be **with you**, as he was with Moses! ¹⁸ Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him, shall be put to death. **Only be strong and courageous.**”

There are **two** principles I’d like to draw your attention to in this passage which’ll help us avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

i. Strength and courage are tied to God’s presence.

Twice in our passage, God orders Joshua to be "strong and courageous." It wasn't a simple encouragement, but a commandment. Joshua didn’t have a choice in the matter.

READ: Joshua 1:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so **I will be with you**. I will not leave you or forsake you. ⁶ **Be strong and courageous,** for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

READ: Joshua 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

This same commandment/encouragement was given by Moses way back in Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 31:6-8). He told both Israel and Joshua to “be strong and courageous” because it was the Lord who goes before them and it is the Lord who will be with them till very end.

God’s presence ought to be of great encouragement to the believer. Famously, the Psalmist said, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me.” Death—the great boogie-man—may be able to take our lives but he cannot frighten or discourage us when we know God is with us.

Now, I know I’ve said this before, many times in fact, however, I cannot help but point out once again how Matthew bookends his own gospel by highlighting the fact that Jesus Christ is with us.

READ: Matthew 1:23 (ESV)

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

READ: Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The entire message of Matthew’s gospel can be summed up by simply saying, “Jesus Christ is God with us.” It is God’s presence alone which gives us strength and courage. To know that we are not alone as walk through this wearisome world ought to inspire us.

ii. Prosperity and success are tied to our obedience.

Just as the knowledge of God's presence produces strength and courage in our hearts, so too does obedience to God's word produce a prosperous and successful life.

READ: Joshua 1:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not 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, 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 good success.

It is crucial to understand that the OT, more than the NT, makes a clear connection between earthly prosperity and biblical obedience. This is because God's primary means of blessing was building up the Jewish nation through attaining lands and population growth.

Now, however, God's primary means of blessing is through Jesus Christ by which we not only gain forgiveness from our sins but also adoption into God's family. What's more, we also receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. All of which are vastly more valuable than anything we can get in this life. However, that is not to say that all of God's blessings today are purely spiritual. Instead, all Christian prosperity is tied directly to being faithful to the truth, and, generally speaking, the one who obeys God's word will have a prosperous and successful life.

For instance, Third John, which is the shortest book in the NT, clocking in at only 219 words, takes a moment to reiterate the connection between obedience and wellness.

READ: 3 John 2-4 (ESV)

² Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. ³ For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

As John tied well-being and good health with walking in the truth, so God ties prosperity and success to our obedience. The whole premise of the Book of Proverbs is rooted in the children of God obeying the commandments of God.

But it isn't only Proverbs which speaks of this. Interestingly, the entire book of Psalms starts this way.

READ: Psalm 1 (ESV)

¹ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law, he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. ⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶ for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

The man who is so delighted to study God's Word that he checks in on it day and night will find that he is blessed with a good life. This bible geek is like an evergreen planted by the water, whereas those who hate the bible are nothing but dust on the wind.

These ideas that strength and courage are tied to God's presence and prosperity and success is tied our obedience are the very same things that Jesus tells the disciples before going to the cross. In fact, while these principles are laid out linearly in Joshua 1, in John 14, Jesus interweaves God's presence and our obedience together. This cumulative effect then produces things like courage, strength, prosperity and success.

READ: John 14:15-28 (ESV)

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. [our obedience] ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, [God's presence] ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸ "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. [success and prosperity] ²⁷ Peace I leave

with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. [strength and courage]

As Moses told Joshua, God told Joshua, and Joshua told the Israelites, so Jesus told His disciples and I, as your pastor, tell you, the only way for you to have strength, courage, prosperity, and success in 2021 is through relying on God's presence and obeying God's commandments. The only way you can avoid a future that dooms you to repeat the mistakes of your past is to know God is with you and to obey God's will for your life.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

The response of Israel to Joshua ought to be very same response we give to God in 2020:

READ: Joshua 1:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ And they answered Joshua, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. ¹⁷ Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses! ¹⁸ Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous."

Whatever God commands, we will obey. Wherever God sends, we will go.

How do you keep from repeating the mistakes of the past? You focus on the commands of God's word and the direction of God will. Even if you've made a mistake thousands of times, the best way to move forward is not looking back and trying to "learn from the mistakes" as is so often prescribed. Instead, if we want to break the cycle, we must focus on the positive outcome of adopting God's behavior for our lives.¹ Don't try to fix your past; instead, fix your attention on the present.

Ultimately, one can never truly understand why we make the mistakes we do. Many factors go into play around our choices. What we can do is direct our attention to the unchanging principles of Scripture and the positive outcome of God's will moving forward. That, no matter what God commands, we will obey, and, wherever God sends, we will go.

¹ Khazan, Olga, "Why Mistakes Are Often Repeated," February 25, 2016, *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/02/why-mistakes-are-often-repeated/470778/>, [accessed, December 31, 2020], is a helpful article that explores the psychology of why we make the same mistakes over and over again.

Video Description

Doomed to Repeat | Week 1 | “Trust and Obey”

TEXT: Joshua 1