

JOSHUA

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Joshua chapter 23 as we continue our study through the Word of God. Tonight we will finish up our study in the book of Joshua and what a journey it has been as God has given to us lessons of faith, how to walk that spirit filled life!

In these two chapters that we will cover tonight, we are going to see Joshua give his farewell address to the leaders of Israel and then to the nation as a whole. And obviously, passing the mantel on to the next generation is important. Joshua is going to encourage them to take a stand for the Lord, not to compromise their faith. That has to be the heart of any true leader!

Remember the farewell address that Moses gave as he was passing the mantle of leadership on to Joshua, as he was encouraging the nation to take the land that God had given to them, to walk by faith and not by sight! We see this farewell address in Deuteronomy 31:2-6 as we are told, **“And he said to them: ‘I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the Lord has said to me, “You shall not cross over this Jordan.” The Lord your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the Lord has said. And the Lord will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land, when He destroyed them. The Lord will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.””**

But now it was Joshua’s turn and Joshua really didn’t have a leader to pass on this mantle to. Joshua was giving it to the leaders, the priests to help the people grow in the Lord and not get sidetracked! The problem for Joshua is the people were already getting complacent in their walk with the Lord. Maybe they were tired of fighting and just wanted to give peace a chance even if it was with the enemies of their faith!

Thus, Joshua is going to admonish them to follow the Lord whole-heartedly so that they will not fall into idolatry, they will not turn from the Lord! And folk’s, this is also a warning to us as we shall see. There are some great spiritual lessons God has for us this evening. With that said, let’s begin reading in Joshua chapter 23, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

JOSHUA 23**VERSES 1-2**

1. Joshua knows his time is short, he will die soon but before he dies he wants to give the leaders words of encouragement so they will carry on the work of God. And here we see the heart of a man of God. There must have been so much going through his mind as his body began to fail and yet, he is not focused on himself, but upon the next generation, upon others!

Do you realize that this is a New Testament idea we see here in the heart of Joshua and this is in the Old Testament! He is others-centered instead of being self-centered. It truly is the mind of Christ manifested in this man. Paul put it like this in Philippians 2:1-4, **“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”**

May that be our passion, that we are others-centered instead of being self-centered. “But what about my needs?” you may ask. Folk’s, if you are others-centered, if you care for others, God will take care of your needs, it is just how it works. If you are self-centered, you will always be looking for more, your needs will never be met!

2. Joshua also tells us that a long time has passed by, maybe some 20 years now since they have entered the Promise Land. Seven of those years were fighting together as a nation against these nations and then another 13 years the individual tribes were fighting those pockets of resistance, occupying the land that was allotted them.

3. Now this farewell address, this message that Joshua gave to the leaders in Israel is really repeated some three times here. First of all in verses 3-8 as Joshua tells them, **“for the Lord your God is He who has fought for you.”** Then, in verses 9-13 Joshua reminds them, **“For the Lord has driven out from before you great and strong nations.”** And lastly, in verses 14-16 Joshua reminds them, **“And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed.”**

Joshua wanted them to remember what God has done for them, that this was not because of their might, their strength, their ingenuity, but all that God has done for them. In other words, apart from God they would have none of this. Again, this is a New Testament idea. Jesus said in John 15:5, **“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”** And Paul reminds us in Ephesians 1:3, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”** I think that is the lesson we need to take from this. That apart from God, apart from Jesus, we can’t do anything for all the spiritual blessings that we have in the heavenly places are found only in Christ!

VERSES 3-8

1. Remember back in Joshua 1:5-9 what the Lord told Joshua to encourage Him in the work that was before him, the battles that he was going to face. He told him, **“No man shall 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 leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe 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. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”**

Joshua learned those lessons, he trusted in the Lord, he trusted that what God had promised He was more than able to bring to pass and now Joshua was passing this on to the leaders in Israel. What a great lesson for us as we too can encourage others to walk by faith and not by sight!

2. And notice how Joshua does this. He first shows them, reminds them all that God has done for them. It truly is what the Psalmist said in Psalm 44:3, **“For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword, Nor did their own arm save them; But it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance, Because You favored them.”** Don’t loose sight of who is in control and I will give you a hint, it is not you! It obviously is the Lord and isn’t that what we desire? Of course it is!

3. Now the children of Israel trusted in the Lord for those big battles, and I don’t think that is what Joshua was concerned about. I think he was more concerned about those times of peace and prosperity, that truly is the most dangerous times for a nation and for individuals to go through because we tend to take our eyes off the enemy and yes, even off the Lord!

4. So what is the solution to this problem? I think Joshua gives us a three-fold answer or approach that is really simple if you think about it. First of all we read in Joshua 23:6, **“Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left.”** In other words, ***KEEP THE WORD!*** That seems so obvious and yet, how many people today are actually reading the Word of God? How many churches are teaching the Word of God? Is it really that important? You bet it is. Remember what Paul told Timothy, **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”** II Timothy 3:16-17. ***KEEP THE WORD OF GOD!***

The second approach that Joshua gave these leaders and us is found in Joshua 23:7, **“and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them.”** In other words, ***SEPARATE YOURSELF FROM THE WORLD!***

This is hard for many but remember what Paul said in II Corinthians 6:14-18, **“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.’ I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.”**

Also, Paul tells us in Romans 12:2, **“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”** And John reminds us in I John 2:15-17, **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”**

You see, separation is vital for the man of God. We cannot cleave to God and yet be bound to His enemies at the same time. The world wants to *CONFORM* you into its image but Christ wants to *TRANSFORM* you into His image! Thus, *SEPARATE YOURSELF FROM THE WORLD!*

And the third approach that Joshua gave the leaders in Israel is found in Joshua 23:8, **“but you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day.”** In other words, we are to be *AFFECTIONATE TO THE LORD!* Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 22:37, “. . . **‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’**” How do we do that? By spending time with Him. Jesus warns us in Matthew 6:21, **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** If your treasure is the Lord then that is where your heart will be also and that just speaks of love. If the world is your treasure, then you are in love with the world! It is a choice we must make. Thus, we are to be *AFFECTIONATE TO THE LORD!*

You see, set your priorities and you will not succumb to the enemies of your life. Keep the Word, separate yourself from the world, and be affectionate towards the Lord and you will do well!

VERSES 9-13

1. God did work mightily through the nation of Israel, driving out armies that were bigger and stronger than they were. And we see this illustrated for us today with the nation of Israel, with its birth in 1948, after wandering for almost 2,000 years, and yet God preserved them. One great example of God's hand upon this nation is seen in what took place in 1973, when Israel was attacked from the north and the south on one of their holiest of days, Yom Kippur.

The Arab nations knew that most Jews would be in the Synagogue, and not prepared for war nor were they expecting it. And as the Syrian forces attacked from the north, there were only a couple of men who could operate the tanks in this area, and when one of these men heard what was happening, he came running. By the time he got into position, the other 2 tanks were taken out, and his tank was the only one left. So this man took his tank on the hills of the Golan Heights, and would come to the top of the hill, fire a shot, knock off a Syrian tank, and go down the other side of the hill. Each time he knocked off a tank he would report back to headquarters “The Zwiigggy patrol got another one!” And as they Syrians watched this one tank go up and down the hill, they thought the Golan Heights were loaded with Israeli tanks, and in reality, there was only one!

So instead of forging ahead and taking the area, and if they did they had a clear shot to Jerusalem, they retreated! They retreated because of 1 man, and they were a whole army. That is exactly what God said He would do in Joshua 23:10. **“One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.”** Now before the cease-fire, Israeli forces pushed within sight of Damascus (in Syria) and Cairo (in Egypt). And 100,000 Egyptian soldiers were trapped in the Sinai Peninsula at the mercy of Israel for food and water. And Israel fed them and led them to the Egyptian border and allowed them to cross unharmed.

2. Now look at what is happening in Israel today. They are trying to make peace with their enemies, trading land for peace, and how is that working? Obviously not too good and that is what God is saying here. They have become snares and traps and scourges and thrones to Israel! You can’t make peace with the enemy!

3. Folk's, in our own lives there is a war going on with the enemy. And what we must think of as an "innocent Canaanite" in our lives today may become a snare, a trap, a scourge, a thorn to us tomorrow! And folk's, they may not look bad to start with, they may look wonderful and peaceful, but look out! May we see past this and cling to the Lord. I think Redpath puts it all in perspective for us as he wrote, "How often we see that the temptation we have pampered and encouraged and indulged in has become a scourge and a thorn in our side. The compromising Christian is not a happy man. Let the enemy remain in a Christian life, let him have one foothold, and he soon becomes a scourge." How true that is!

4. One last point here. The word "**cling**" or "**cleave**" in verse 12 speaks of a close and intimate relationship. You see, you can't play with fire without eventually getting burned. And that is exactly what happened to the nation of Israel. They become one with the enemy, and ended up serving their gods instead of the true and living God who delivered them out of Egypt, preserved them those forty years in the wilderness, and now has brought them into the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. The enemy does a great job of deceiving us, and we are ripping ourselves off if we side with him, getting the garbage when God has opened His kingdom up to us!

VERSES 14-16

1. Joshua tells them he is dying, and he is speaking of the universality of death, that he was going to die like everyone else would one day. But before he does he wants them to know the faithfulness of God. Nothing that God has promised them has failed. God is faithful but for the children of Israel it was linked to their obedience. If they turned from God He would turn from them and we saw the blessings and cursings spoken of in Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28. And Joshua wants them to understand that! He doesn't want them to forget it.

2. What does that mean for us today? First of all we have been redeemed from the curse of the Law according to Galatians 3:10-14. Thus, we no longer experience God's faithfulness to curse us as with Israel but He is faithful to correct us and we do miss out on the blessings for disobedience. It is as Paul tells us in Hebrews 12:6-7, "**For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?**"

3. Thus, the key is really simple. Keep the Word of God. Separate yourself from the world. And be affectionate towards the Lord!

JOSHUA 24**VERSE 1**

1. Here we see Joshua gather the tribes of Israel together in Shechem, in the heart of the land. It was in this valley that the priests spoke the cursings and the blessings. It was here that a copy of the Law, the book of Deuteronomy was written on a stone for all to see. Now some may argue that with all the people gathered together how could they all hear without sound equipment. Keep in mind that this is where the tribes gathered for the blessings and the cursings and not just the leaders before and this area does form a kind of natural amphitheater that has great acoustic properties. So I do believe all the people of Israel could hear Joshua's farewell address!

VERSES 2-13

1. Like Moses, Joshua recaps the history of the nation of Israel. He starts out with Abraham who lived on the other side of the Euphrates River in the area of Mesopotamia. And most Jews would die if they heard of their father Abraham referred to in this manner, but he was an idol-worshipping gentile before God called him. And Abraham crossed over (That is what the word Hebrew means) the River Euphrates and surrendered his life unto God by faith. To Abraham was born Isaac and unto Isaac was born Jacob, who took his family down to Egypt because of the famine in the land. But God was not going to leave them down in Egypt; He had a plan for them. He would bring them into the land He promised them!

2. As Joshua recounts God's faithfulness to the children of Israel I want you to see God's hand upon them and His sovereignty working together. In verse 3 we see the words "**I took.**" In verse 4 "**I gave.**" In verse 5 "**I sent.**" In verses 6-8 "**I brought.**" In verse 10 "**I would not listen.**" In verse 11 "**I delivered.**" In verse 12 "**I sent.**" And in verse 13 "**I have given.**" In fact the personal pronoun "I" in speaking of God is used some seventeen times in these verses!

You see, God works according to His plan, His purpose and He does work through us. Thus, in knowing that man should fear the Lord for He is in control, He is LORD over all!

VERSES 14-15

1. How sad to see that they already had begun to fall into idolatry. They had in their possession the gods that their fathers served on the other side of the Euphrates River, in Mesopotamia. They also had the gods that they served down in Egypt. Joshua had not even died yet and they had already begun their decline.

2. The challenge that Joshua makes to the nation is who will they serve? Everyone is guided by something; we all serve someone or something. As Bob Dylan rightly said, "But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed. You're gonna have to serve somebody. Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord. But you're gonna have to serve somebody".

Joshua was encouraging them to serve the Lord in sincerity - without hypocrisy. Either serve the Lord with your whole heart or serve the gods of the other nations with you whole heart, make a choice! You see, it is not a question of “if” but “who.” We all worship something or someone. That is the point that Jesus makes in Matthew 6:24 when He says **“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”** Joshua knew whom he would serve, *THE LORD!*

3. I think that Redpath hit the nail on the head when he wrote:

The best test of sincerity is not always the open hostility of foes, for this often braces up the energies of combat, while at the same time it makes the path of duty clear. Still less is it at the hour of triumph over our foes, then there is no temptation to rebel. The real test of our faithfulness to God is in most cases is our power to continue steadfastly in one course of conduct when the excitement of conflict is removed, and the enemies with which we have to contend are the insidious allurements of ease or custom amid the common place duties of life.

- Redpath

4. Now Joshua is a great historical figure and great historical figures are remembered for their powerful quotations, like:

- “Give me liberty or give me death,” Patrick Henry thundered in the days of the American Revolution.
- “We have nothing to fear but fear itself,” said Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the dark days of the Great Depression.

- “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country,” said John F. Kennedy in his first inaugural address.
- “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind,” were the words of Neil Armstrong, the first man to put his foot on the surface of the moon.
- “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” Joshua declared on the plains of Shechem.

Folk’s here is a challenge for you and your family, especially for you men out there.

Are you going to take a stand for your family? Are you going to show them that no matter what others may do, our home is going to serve the Lord? I don’t care what this person or that person is doing. I don’t care what activity is going on here or there. Our desire, our passion is to serve the Lord. If you don’t your children will pick up on it and they will follow your example! Be like Joshua, **“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**

VERSES 16-18

1. We see the children of Israel speak very quickly that they wanted to serve the Lord, but they were already involved in idolatry. It is easy to speak of serving God, but they did not destroy their idols. Joshua wanted more than just an emotional response; he wanted it to come from their heart. It is as the parable of the soils, when Jesus was speaking of how different people receive the word of God, the condition of their heart. He said **“But he who received the seed on the stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.”** Matthew 13:20-21.

2. In the excitement of the day, the people were willing to say anything and that is the way it does go sometimes. People make all kinds of promises and yet their heart is not really in it. You see, God wants us to not only hear His Word but to obey it and to get rid of those idols in our lives that are hindering our relationship with the Lord. Not just an emotional response but one that truly comes from the heart!

VERSES 19-21

1. Joshua wants them to understand what they are agreeing to. He does not want them to be half-hearted in their response. In fact, he is discouraging them if they are going to have a lightweight type of commitment to the Lord. If they can't serve the Lord fully then don't bother! We need to count the cost and decided if we are willing to be fully committed to the Lord because that is what He desires of us!

2. Regarding the problem with idols, Carl Armerding writes:

Idolatry seems to have been one of Israel's besetting sins. Their earliest ancestors served other gods, as we have seen (v.2). When Jacob and his family left Laban, it was Rachel who carried off her father's gods (Gen. 31:30-34). But when they arrived in the land, Jacob ordered his household to put away these "strange gods," and he hid them under an oak tree that was by Shechem (Gen. 35:2, 4). And in the same place Joshua urged his generation to put away the gods which their fathers served (v. 14).

- Carl Armerding

Folk's, God wants us to stay away from idols as I have said. Not statues but those ungodly passions's, those compromises, that flirting with stuff you know is not right. In Ezekiel 14:3-4 we are told, **“Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak to them, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols.””** God is serious about this and thus, may we be totally committed to Him!

VERSES 22-28

1. Joshua again wants them to understand the commitment they made to the Lord. And evidence of that commitment was for them to get rid of their idols. And this large stone that was set up was a stone of witness, a testimony to the covenant that the children of Israel made with the Lord. Interestingly enough archeologists excavating this site in Shechem have uncovered a great limestone pillar, which may be the remembrance stone that Joshua set up!

VERSES 29-31

1. Joshua faithfully served the Lord and he died at the age of 110 years old. And notice his legacy, **“Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord which He had done for Israel.”** Joshua 24:31. His godly influence was effectively communicated to and through the whole nation! And Joshua is buried in the land of his inheritance, the land that God promised to give the children of Israel and now they are dwelling in because they were willing to walk by faith and not by sight!

VERSE 32

1. I am not sure who was in charge of the bones or the mummified body of Joseph all those years, but kudos to them! They didn't lose him or forget him, or even misplace him all those 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, during those 20 years of battles as they are taking the Promise Land! Not bad at all! And here we see the completion of what Joseph had told his family before his death in Egypt. He wanted them to carry his bones into the Promised Land and bury them there. Joseph died in Egypt, in bondage, but he believed by faith that God was going to bring them into the Promised Land, the land of Canaan, and He did!

VERSE 33

1. With the death of Joshua and now Eleazar, many feel that Phinehas completed these last six verses of Joshua. But we now see another chapter closing and the next generation is going to carry on the work of God. But tragically, as we will see as we get to the book of Judges, how quickly people can turn from the Lord because what was known of God was not passed on to future generations, because compromise and complacency drew them away from God! May we learn that lesson!

You see, we need to love the Lord and to love the Lord is to fear him. We are not to let compromise or complacency draw us away. We are to pass on the things of God to future generations! Now what do I mean by the fear of the Lord? Simply. We are to respect, to reverence the Lord. It doesn't mean that we tremble in fear of Him unless we don't know Him and then we should fear Him and the coming judgment. The solution to that is to come to know Him and have that reverential fear of God. You see, He is our loving God. We are told in Psalm 111:10, "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.**"

Now besides having a reverence to the Lord, we are told in Proverbs 8:13 that **“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.”** You see, the fear of the Lord works in us and then works through us, in the things we do and the things we say! We are being conformed into His image. To hate the things He hates and love the things He loves. As you love the LORD more and more, you will find that you manifest the things that are in His heart, to hate evil and-so-on. That is what we are to do and that is what we are to pass on to the next generation!

2. As I close this evening let me leave you with this to think about. “God buries His workmen but continues His work.” You see, we are just vessels that God works in and through to complete His plan and His purposes. All God is looking for is people who are available for Him to use for His glory. People that love Him and are willing to take those steps of faith as Joshua did! Are you those people!