



Joshua 23 Complacency Will Kill You

We have come to the end of the book of Joshua. We've met Rahab and the spies she hid, we've seen the battle of Jericho and the subsequent military campaigns to take the rest of the land. And along the way we've sought to remember where all of this fits into the flow of history.

We've remembered that God called Abraham out of the area that is modern Iraq, and told him: "I want to use you. So, I'm going to do three things for you. I'm going to give you descendants that will be more numerous than the sand on the seashore, I'm going to give you a place for all of them to live, and I'm going to use you to bless all humanity." Those descendants became the people of Israel, the place He gave them to live was the land of Israel, and the blessing He promised was the fact that Jesus Christ was born in Israel to Israeli parents.

The book of Joshua is the historical account of how God fulfilled the second part of that promise – Joshua tells how God gave the land of Israel to the people of Israel. And as we've been reading it together we've noticed that the process of the people taking over the land is much like the process of the Christian growing in Christ – that's important for you to understand. The people were already Jews, they were already descendants of Abraham, they were already God's chosen people, He was leading them into the Promised Land, but they still had to go to war against the people who were living there and drive them out. There were still battles to fight in order to fully possess what God was giving them.

So too with you and me. If you have come to Christ and confessed your sin, and repented (that means to turn away from your sin, to say, "I don't want to do this, or be this, anymore") if you have done that, if you have repented and asked God to forgive you through Christ, you are forgiven. The Scripture says, "[If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.](#)" (1 John 1:9) It's a done deal.

But, now it's time to grow in Christ-likeness, because you aren't just saved from what you used to be; you're called to be something new. You're saved from something, but you're also saved for something. The Israelites had land to possess; you have to grow in Christ, to become more of the man or woman, boy or girl that God wants you to be.

So, you see the parallels between the book of Joshua and our own lives in Christ. Well, now we come to the end of the book. At this point Joshua is well over 100 years old, and he gathers the people together for a parting speech. First, in Chapter 23 he's going to speak to the elders and leaders of the nation, and then, in chapter 24 he's going to address everyone. And listen to what this old man, near the end of his life has to say, after all he's been through, after all he's seen.

Joshua 23:1 Now it came to pass, a long time after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age. 2 And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them:

“I am old, advanced in age. 3 You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God *is* He who has fought for you. 4 See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward. 5 And the LORD your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

He starts by reminding them of what God has done. Joshua tells the leaders of the nation: you have seen everything that God has done – you were here, you fought the battles, you walked across the dry land when God parted the Jordan River, you walked around Jericho seven times, you guys were here, you saw it, and now, now you’re living in the very land that God promised to your ancestors.

And as if all that isn’t enough, God wants to do even more. There are still some more tribes to drive out, and God will do it if the people will follow His lead. If they keep up the fight, He has even more to give them. He has more promises for them.

Again, this is just like our modern relationship with God. He comes to us and offers to forgive us of our sins, and that’s GREAT, but then He also wants to drive the roots of sin out of our lives, He wants us to adopt new habits, to drop old habits, to take on new ways of thinking and new patterns and goals and values. God always has more in store for us than we have actually received from Him. And He keeps calling out to us, “Follow Me, and I’ll show you more.”

But it’s not going to be easy, for Israel, or for us – there will be temptations along the way, reasons not to work, reasons not to advance.

6 Therefore be very courageous

There’s that word again – how many times have we seen it in Joshua, how many times has courage been emphasized? God told Joshua to have courage, the people to told him to have courage, and now he’s telling them to have courage. Friends, being a Christian, following God, isn’t always easy, it isn’t always popular. There are time when you will need to have courage. If you’re afraid, if you’re embarrassed, if you’re being quite when you should be speaking up, you need courage. Be courageous! God knows what you’re feeling, and he’s giving you this example to see that other people have been intimidated too – it’s natural – so be supernatural instead, 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, 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, 8 but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day. 9 For the LORD has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but *as for* you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day. 10 One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God *is* He who fights for you, as He promised you. 11 Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God.

When the nation of Israel came into the land of Israel, God gave them victory over many of the people that lived there. But not all of them. Like any invading army, there's a difference between defeating the opposing the army and actually controlling all the land. There are pockets of resistance, holdouts who need to be swept up over time.

And Joshua is warning the leaders: don't forget, the job's not finished yet. Don't grow so content with what you've received that you forget there's more work to do.

Think of the example of the improvements we've been making around here. It was a big and dramatic thing to knock out the two walls that used to be back in the foyer. It was a pretty impressive project to knock them out and open up the space. But after all the demolition is done, there's a whole lot more work that remains. And much of it is monotonous, dull, repetitive, small, boring, but essential work.

Think about the process of painting. Most people love to come through with a roller and spread the new color across a large flat wall – to see big, dramatic, immediate change. But who wants to do all the cutting in, all the corners and where the wall meets the ceiling, all the detail work? Who wants to do that? Not many people.

And yet it needs to be done, it must be done. Joshua is reminding the Israelites – you've taken out some walls, you've painted some others, but the project isn't finished yet.

And, he warns them: don't grow complacent. Don't get used to living with the project half done. Don't get friendly with the people you're supposed to be driving out. Don't let their way of doing things become your way of doing things. You're supposed to be different, *because* you belong to God.

And right there is where many Christians trip up. It's why people seem to go forward in their relationship with God and then backslide or fall away, or lose their passion and zeal. It's why people accuse the church of being full of hypocrites. It's because we come to Christ, and maybe we even have a mighty 'come to Jesus' moment. We're confronted with the wreck that we've made of our lives, or our rebellion, it's often driven by an awareness of the fact that we need help, that something has to change, and so we come to Jesus. And if He is calling to us and we confess our sins and repent of them, then God the Father adopts us as sons and daughters. He forgives us and loves us.

Spiritually speaking, some walls are knocked down in our lives, the big wall is painted in our hearts, the enemy army is smashed in the battle for our soul. But the project isn't

complete. There's more work to do. And we can't get used to living in a half-completed project. God has more for us. And He had more for Israel. So He warns us – stick with Me. Don't get caught up in the things of this world. In verse 7 God warns the people of Israel: *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.*

Compare that to what Paul tells the Ephesians in 5 as he reminds the Christians there that God is calling them to walk in the light. He says,

Ephesians 5:10 [find] out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

Brothers and sisters, fellow Christians, we need to hear this word from God and take it seriously. He has begun a good work in you and He will be faithful to complete – He began to bring Israel into the land, and would have given them more – but they needed to keep progressing and so do we.

Listen to the encouragement of *Heb 12: 1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus,*

There are things around you that will hold you down, that will hold you back, that will keep you from advancing in your spiritual growth. Watch out for them, stay away from them, be separate, be holy. Enjoy God, because, there are consequences if we don't. Look at what He tells Israel:

12 Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations—these that remain among you—and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you, 13 know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

If you get used to living this way, if you get used to get used to living in a half-built house, sooner or later, it's all going to fall apart on you. God says if you don't drive out the people that need to go, if you don't conquer the habits that need to change (with His help), if you don't commit to making regular progress, the things you tolerate now will be the things that destroy you.

The things you're making excuses for right now will soon become *snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.* In other words, if you don't drive them out, they're going to drive you out.

Friends, Christians, there is no standing still spiritually. You're either making progress toward your Heavenly Father and His Kingdom, or you're slipping and sliding into complacency that will eventually begin to pester, annoy, and conquer you.

It's important stuff for us to know. So Joshua spends his dying days reminding people of this truth, but also reminding them of all that God has done for them already, and all that He will do for them in the future if they will simply submit to God and obey.

14 "Behold, this day I *am* going the way of all the earth. 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.

That's a verse worth underlining or highlighting in your Bible.

Joshua says you *know* this. You know it in your heart and soul. God has never done you wrong. Achan did you wrong. When he stole things that belonged to God, other men died as a result of His disobedience. Suspicion has done you wrong, when you almost went to war with each other because a few of the tribes on eastern side of the river built an altar. But God has never done you wrong. "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."

Christian, the same thing is true for you. God is working all things together for good to those who love Him, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28).

Other people may have done you wrong. Even people close to you – your own spouse, your own children, your own brother or sister, or parents. They may have even done you wrong in the church. And you wonder, why? Friend, I don't have an answer. Sometimes God allows people to do horrible things to other people. Not because He is bad, but because they are bad.

And yet, I want you to consider that He doesn't exempt Himself from that experience and pain. How do you think God the Father felt when Adam and Eve turned their backs on Him?

How do you think Jesus felt when Israel rejected Him? Or when Judas betrayed Him? Or when Peter denied Him? Friends, God has never let you down. Other people have let you down, but they've let Him down too.

This fallen world we live in has let you down. Maybe you've been the victim of a natural disaster or a financial disaster. Maybe you've been diagnosed with an illness or a syndrome, a disease or a cancer. The effects of sin are present everywhere in this world, everything is falling apart because it's natural direction is to flow away from God. This world has failed you, it has let you down, but God has not.

You've let yourself down. You've set goals that you've failed to reach. You've made resolutions you failed to keep. You've tried diets, and habits, and systems, and programs. And you've failed yourself. You've wanted to improve and get better, and you've succeeded for a season and then found yourself right back at square one. You've failed yourself. But God has never failed you.

Put that to the test. Joshua tells these people, you know it in your heart and in your soul. The things that God has promised have come to pass. Isn't that true with you? Can you accuse God of anything except not preventing certain things from coming your way? And if He has allowed them to come your way can you confidently say that either 1) you didn't deserve it, or 2) if you didn't deserve it, that He didn't offer to help carry you through it?

Can you accuse God of ever failing you or abandoning you? Joshua is bold. He's willing to put God on trial – to say, examine Him, prove Him, test Him, is this true or not?

But again, there's another side to all of this. If God is telling the truth about everything He promises to do for us or to save us from, then He must also be telling the truth when He gives us of the consequences of going the other way.

Joshua 23:15 Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you, so the LORD will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the LORD your God has given you. 16 When you have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you."

Joshua tells the leaders – you can't stay where you are. You can't just enjoy a little bit of what God has done. You've got to commit. You're either all in with God, or you slowly begin to accept the status quo and eventually it all turns against you.

God isn't satisfied with where you are right now, and you shouldn't be either. Either you commit to follow Him in the direction He wants to lead you, or you stay where you are or begin to drift away, and suffer the consequences. You become one of the very enemies of God that He is offering to defeat for you.

Christians, followers of Christ, we also need to heed the warning to avoid those things that can pull us away from God. Look, it's easier to leave the project unfinished, it's easier to not drive the rest of the enemies out, it's easier to just come to church every now and then while the rest of your life is an ungodly mess. And maybe you even feel bad about it at times, you have a sense of conviction, the Holy Spirit is impressing things upon you, but it's easier to just go with the flow. It's hard to fight and keep fighting. It's hard to resist. It's hard to improve things that are falling apart. It's hard to do the detail work.

But look back on all the progress that has already been made.

Did you notice this? Joshua wants the people to get fuel for future projects from reflecting on past experiences. He tells them, and us, look back at what God has already done! And didn't some of those things seem impossible at first too? Did you ever believe that those things would work out, or that this could be forgiven, or that that could change?

Well, if He can give you victory in those things, (and you know in your heart and in your soul that He can, you know that not one of these things He promised has failed to come to pass), then can you keep trusting Him for today and tomorrow as well?

Friends, some things about our lives need to change. Some of us are growing weary and tired, some are growing complacent. We're getting used to the status quo. Inertia is strong and we feel the resistance when we try to move. But God is warning us. Don't settle down. Don't make friends with things that are your enemy. If God is showing you things that need to go, and I believe He is, you need to obey. You need to drive them out, don't make friends with them, don't become buddy-buddy, drive them, drive it, out.

God is calling you to holiness, to purity, to righteousness. There is to be a difference, a distinction between you as a Christian and the people around you, just as there was a difference between Israel and her neighbors.

We're going to celebrate communion now. We're going to remember the blood that was shed. Blood was shed in battle during Joshua's time to bring Israel into the land; but the blood of Christ was shed as a perfect sacrifice for our sins to bring us into relationship with God. It marks the beginning of what needs to keep going.

And as we prepare to receive the elements, I want you to take this moment to ask God how this all applies to you. Is there anything He wants to drive out, any complacency that has been creeping in? And if necessary, put God on trial – ask yourself, have any of His good promises ever failed you? He can withstand the scrutiny, I guarantee. And then, when you've seen His grace and mercy, you can worship and thank Him. We've seen two consecrations already this morning – a young missionary couple following Christ to the far corners of the globe and a mother and daughter following Christ in baptism. They were already saved, now they're just being obedient. What about you? What about me? Where is Christ leading us, and will we follow?

Let's pray.