

We have come to the conclusion of the book of Joshua.

It began “after the death of Moses”

when Joshua is commissioned by God to lead the people into the land:

“Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.”

It ends with the death of Joshua,

after God fulfilled all that he had promised.

In chapters 1-5 we heard of the crossing of the Jordan,  
how God brought his people into the Land of Promise.

In chapters 6-12 we heard of the conquest of the land,

how God went before Israel—through Joshua—and delivered their enemies into their hands.

In chapters 13-21 we heard of the division of the inheritance,

how God gave to each tribe an inheritance in the land.

Joshua ends, then, with two stories.

The first, a story of how Israel nearly went to war against the eastern tribes,  
because they built an altar.

But the altar, it turned out, was innocent—an altar of witness,  
to remind Israel that the LORD, he is God.

Now we come to the final story—the conclusion of the book of Joshua.

There are two gatherings recounted in Joshua 23-24.

But these two gatherings are interrelated.

First, Joshua summons the elders and judges of Israel

### **1. I Am Now Old (v1-13)**

*23 A long time afterward, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, <sup>2</sup> Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, “I am now old and well advanced in years.*

The prelude to this story is important:

“...when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies”

Joshua dies at the age of 110.

He was probably in his 30s-40s during the Exodus,

since he was already the commander of the army by Exodus 18.

He was then in his 70s-80s during the Conquest.

We saw that the conquest takes around five years or so.

But now it is “a long time afterward” –

perhaps 20 years or so after the Conquest.

He speaks to a generation of elders that has seen with their eyes  
the great works of the LORD:

They were born in Egypt or the wilderness – and now they are old.

They grew up in the wilderness – watching the rebellion of their fathers.

They spent their manhood following Joshua –

seeing God’s faithfulness to Joshua –

watching Joshua be strong and courageous,

so that Joshua might cause Israel to inherit the land.

Joshua highlights both of these points in verses 3-4:

**a. You Have Seen What God Has Done (v3)**

<sup>3</sup> *And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you.*

Joshua was the instrument of God,

the covenant mediator through whom Israel inherited the land.

But he understands full well that *he* is not the one who fought for Israel.

God himself is the one who delivered the nations into Israel’s hand.

But Joshua is the one through whom Israel has inherited the land (v4)

**b. I Have Allotted to You Your Inheritance (v4)**

<sup>4</sup> *Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west.*

Joshua makes clear that the work is not finished.

He is the one who *begins* to cut off the nations –

but there is more left to be done!

In a very real sense, the book of Joshua is the OT version of the gospel of Luke –

and the book of Judges is the OT version of the book of Acts.

Joshua is the Jesus who causes us to inherit the land.

And the apostles are the judges who are filled with the Spirit

to establish the kingdom of God.

You probably have never thought about Joshua and Judges in that way!!

And I don’t blame you –

because the Judges are such catastrophic failures,

whereas the Apostles faithfully bear witness to Jesus!

But the twelve apostles are appointed as the NT equivalent of the twelve tribes.  
The same Holy Spirit comes upon them –  
though in the NT, the Holy Spirit comes upon *all* of God’s people!  
And when the Holy Spirit comes upon them,  
they go forth to establish the kingdom of God!

But here at the end of Joshua,  
you certainly see Joshua as a shadow and type of Christ.

After all, Joshua here speaks to the elders and judges.  
Why the elders and judges?  
Because now they are the ones who must lead.  
There is something of a leadership transition here.  
As Moses had appointed Joshua,  
now Joshua is handing over the mantle,  
but this time not to one man,  
but to the ordinary rulers of the people.  
In a similar manner, Jesus will appoint the apostles,  
who will hand over their mantle,  
not to one, but to all the elders of the church.  
And Joshua reminds the elders of their motivation for faithful leadership:

The basic motivation for faithful leadership is to remember  
that the LORD will do what he has promised (v5):

**c. The LORD Will Do What He Has Promised (v5)**

<sup>5</sup> *The LORD your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you.*

As usual, the indicative precedes the imperative.  
The statement of what God has done precedes the command to obey.

Think of the Ten Commandments,  
where the opening statement is the foundation for our obedience:  
“I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt,  
out of the house of bondage.”

That’s an indicative – it’s a statement of fact.  
This is what God has done.

Here in verse 5, we hear a *future* indicative.  
The LORD will continue to do what he has promised.

The LORD will push back your enemies – and you shall possess their land –

“just as the LORD your God promised you.”

You can trust God.

He will be faithful to do what he has promised!

And so , because God will go before you,

because God will destroy your enemies,

“Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do

all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses”

As Moses had spoken to him, so now Joshua speaks to the elders of Israel.

**d. Therefore Be Strong to Keep and Do What God Has Commanded (v6-13)**

*<sup>6</sup> Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left,*

Pay attention to what God has told you to do.

What has God told you to do?

Love your neighbor as yourself!

How do I do that?

Honor your father and your mother.

That doesn't just mean “obey them” – but *honor them*.

Do not kill –

do not *harm* others – and in your anger, do not lash out at others.

Do not steal –

but look for the ways that you can support and encourage others;  
be diligent in your use of time and resources.

Do not commit adultery –

do not seek your own selfish gratification,  
but love others in the way you speak – in the way you look at them –

Do not bear false witness –

but speak the truth in love –  
use your words to build each other up – not tear each other down.

And do not covet!

All these commands have to do with your *heart* –  
not just your outward behavior.

But our love for our neighbor must always be rooted in our love for God.

After all, we are not very good at loving our neighbor!

We are profoundly *bad* at loving our neighbor.

Why?

Well, why should I love my neighbor?

After all, he doesn't love me very much!

Why should I be so careful to look out for him,  
when he's just going to stab me in the back?!

But remember where Joshua started this:

What is your motivation for obedience?  
The LORD your God will do what he has promised.

In the same way, your obedience starts with loving *God* because he has loved us!

Notice how verses 7-11 emphasize the importance of the *first* commandment:

**i. Don't Turn to Idolatry (v7-11)**

<sup>7</sup> *that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them,*

**1. Cling to the LORD (v8)**

<sup>8</sup> *but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day.*

Cling to the LORD.

Hold fast to him.

This is the same word that Adam used in Genesis 2:24 –

“a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife,  
and the two shall be one flesh.”

Moses had used this same word in Deuteronomy 13 and Deut 30 –

“that you may obey the LORD and that you may cleave to him –  
for he is your life” (30:20)

And he gives them certain specifics:

1) do not mix with the nations

Israel is to be separate from the nations

They are they holy people of God.

They must not serve other gods,

but they must “cling to the LORD your God.”

The picture here is a common one in the OT –

blending the images of marriage and worship –

cleaving to the LORD your God – vs cleaving to other gods.

Will you be devoted to the LORD your God?

Or you will be devoted to some other god?

Joshua warns Israel against mixing the with the nations –  
joining in their worship, serving their gods.

We live in a culture that does not cling to the LORD.  
We are surrounded by those who are seeking their own pleasure.

And yet when you turn pleasure into your god –  
    pleasure cannot satisfy –  
        the quest for happiness ends in misery.  
When you turn power into your god –  
    you do not obtain mastery –  
        the quest for power ends in slavery.

That's how idolatry works!

I was reading an essay this week on “gentle parenting” –  
    the idea that parents should never use the words “because I told you to” –  
        the author seemed to realize that “gentle parenting”  
            was going to end like every other form of parenting –  
            with traumatized children who blame their parents for all their miseries!

That's how idolatry works!  
    Parents expect to find joy and happiness from their children.  
    Children expect to find joy and happiness from their parents.

    Everyone expects everyone else to be thinking about “my happiness”!

And meanwhile, we ignore the God who made us for himself!  
    Many people wonder why God seems so silent –  
        Why doesn't God reveal himself more openly!??

Think about how Joshua says it in verses 9-10:

## **2. Because God Has Driven Them Out before You (v9-10)**

*<sup>9</sup> For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. <sup>10</sup> One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.*

The LORD fought for Israel in the days of Joshua.  
    One man of Israel put a thousand to flight.  
    And yet – in Joshua's own day – there were several tribes  
        that couldn't seem to convince themselves to go take possession of the land!

It is noteworthy that mighty deeds seem to play an important role at the beginning  
    of a phase of redemptive history;  
    but as time goes on, God wants his people to remember those mighty deeds,

and teach them to their children.

### **3. So Be Careful to Love the LORD Your God (v11)**

*<sup>11</sup> Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God.*

How do you love God?

You show love to God by being a distinctive people—  
by being different from the nations,  
and living according to his laws.  
and particularly, by not intermarrying with the nations.

#### **ii. Don't Intermarry (v12-13)**

*<sup>12</sup> For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you,*

And Joshua uses the same word “cling” (or cleave) –  
that he had used earlier to speak of clinging to God.

Those who worship Yahweh have no business  
intermarrying with those who worship other gods.

(Of course, if the nations convert to Yahweh,  
then they become Israelite! Remember Rahab!)

As we saw last time,  
Phineas admitted in 22:17 that Israel had not cleansed itself  
entirely from the sin of Peor (intermarriage).  
This would be a continual problem throughout Israel's history.  
Samson will fall in love with a Philistine woman.  
Solomon will marry an Egyptian princess.

And that's why Joshua warns:

#### **1. Or They Will Become a Snare and Trap to You (v13)**

*<sup>13</sup> know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you.*

If you refuse to worship the LORD,  
if you turn aside to other gods,  
then you will perish.

But notice how you will perish!  
God's justice is a poetic justice.

If you want to live with the surrounding nations,  
then God will let you live with the surrounding nations!  
They are under his wrath and curse –  
so if you join them – then you will fall under his wrath and curse as well.

## 2. I Am About to Go the Way of All the Earth (v14-16)

In verse 14, Joshua reiterates that his time is over:

### a. Remember That God Has Done What He Promised (v14)

*<sup>14</sup> “And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things<sup>[a]</sup> that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed.*

As Joshua wraps up his speech,  
he reminds them of the central point:  
God has done what he has promised!  
“Not one word has failed”!

That is a good thing!  
It is a blessing.  
But like all good things – like all blessings –  
there is a warning included.

Joshua speaks of the blessings and curses of the covenant:  
They have seen the blessings of the covenant:  
Israel’s faithfulness has resulted in the blessings of the covenant:  
not one word has failed of all the good things God promised  
(read Dt 28:1-14)  
Their enemies fled before them.  
They have received the bounty of Yahweh.

But Joshua warns that disobedience will result in God’s curse:  
(Verse 15-16)

### b. So Remember That God Will Curse You if You Rebel (v15)

*<sup>15</sup> But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the LORD your God has given you,*

### c. If You Serve Other Gods, the Anger of the LORD Will Be Kindled (v16)

*<sup>16</sup> if you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you.”*



We would do well to heed Joshua's warning.  
Not one word has failed of all that God has promised.  
God has given our great Joshua success,  
and he has triumphed over his enemies and entered his rest.  
Now we are called to live as a holy nation, a kingdom of priests.

And in the church, this starts with the elders and the deacons.  
Today I met with our new deacon nominees as we started talking about training.

If we turn away from the gospel – if we forget what God has promised –  
if we do not hold fast to Jesus –  
then we will be destroyed.

A hundred years ago there were five Presbyterian churches in South Bend –  
seven altogether in St. Joe County.  
When I came to Notre Dame 25 years ago,  
there were still six.  
Now there are three –  
and only one still has any life in it.

Of course, it was only 29 years ago that MCPC started –  
but today there are now five solid Reformed churches in St. Joe County –  
and two more in Elkhart County!

But we need to take heed!  
If we allow the spirit of the age to take over the church,  
if we just follow the path of our culture –  
then someday we will become just another apostate church.  
It's not that "conservatism" is the answer.  
Conservatism simply conserves whatever is the status quo.  
A wise man once said that tradition is the living faith of the dead –  
but traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. (Jaroslav Pelikan)

I would only add that those who have died in Christ are not *truly* dead –  
and therefore the faith of the Church is the living faith of the living!

Let us live – and die – and believe – in him!