

Joshua 23:1-16

“Joshua: Promise and Obedience”

Introduction

Since last week, we have been discussing the prophets of the Old Testament under the title, “Prophets Pointing to Christ.”

Today we are going to talk about Joshua, who was the successor of Moses, whom we covered last week. What kind of person the Biblical Joshua was is also covered outside of the Bible. One American jazz and gospel song is called Joshua fit the battle of Jericho. This song is about Joshua's attack on the city of Jericho in Joshua 6. The song says that no man in the Bible is braver than Joshua, even more so than Gideon and King Saul. Surely, the Joshua of the Bible is brave. But Joshua was more than just a brave prophet. As we read Joshua 23:1-16, we will see what kind of prophet Joshua was and how his life's work points to Christ.

Joshua 23:1-16

¹ The years passed, and the Lord had given the people of Israel rest from all their enemies. Joshua, who was now very old, ² called together all the elders, leaders, judges, and officers of Israel. He said to them, “I am now a very old man. ³ You have seen everything the Lord your God has done for you during my lifetime. The Lord your God has fought for you against your enemies. ⁴ I have allotted to you as your homeland all the land of the nations yet unconquered, as well as the land of those we have already conquered—from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ This land will be yours, for the Lord your God will himself drive out all the people living there now. You will take possession of their land, just as the Lord your God promised you.

⁶ “So be very careful to follow everything Moses wrote in the Book of Instruction. Do not deviate from it, turning either to the right or to the left. ⁷ Make sure you do not associate with the other people still remaining in the land. Do not even mention the names of their gods, much less swear by them or serve them or worship them. ⁸ Rather, cling tightly to the Lord your God as you have done until now.

⁹ “For the Lord has driven out great and powerful nations for you, and no one has yet been able to defeat you. ¹⁰ Each one of you will put to flight a thousand of the enemy, for the Lord your God fights for you, just as he has promised. ¹¹ So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

¹² “But if you turn away from him and cling to the customs of the survivors of these nations remaining among you, and if you intermarry with them, ¹³ then know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive them out of your land. Instead, they will be a snare and a trap to you, a whip for your backs and thorny brambles in your eyes, and you will vanish from this good land the Lord your God has given you.

¹⁴ “Soon I will die, going the way of everything on earth. Deep in your hearts you know that every promise of the Lord your God has come true. Not a single one has failed! ¹⁵ But as surely as the Lord your God has given you the good things he promised, he will also bring disaster on you if you disobey him. He will completely destroy you from this good land he has given you. ¹⁶ If you break the covenant of the Lord your God by worshiping and serving other gods, his anger will burn against you, and you will quickly vanish from the good land he has given you.”

This is the living Word of God. Amen.

How should we live our lives as we look at Joshua as a prophet in Joshua 23:1-16? In the beginning, Joshua was confident of the Lord's promise, and the Lord fulfilled His promise to Joshua. We too should move forward being confident in God's promises to us. Secondly, Joshua told the Israelites to rely on the Lord alone. We too should be dependent on the Lord alone every day. Thirdly, by seeing what God did to Joshua, we should believe in the Jesus Christ who is pointed out to us. To summarize today's sermon in three points, we should be confident in God's promises, rely on the Lord alone, and believe in Jesus.

First, Joshua was confident in the Lord's promise, and the Lord fulfilled His promise to Joshua. We too should move forward being confident in God's promises to us. The name Joshua is pronounced, "Ye-ho-shu-a" in Hebrew, and it means "the Lord is salvation". It's the name of our Savior, Jesus, is the Greek and Latin reading/pronunciation of the Hebrew word, "Ye-ho-shu-a".

Joshua was a descendant of Joseph among the twelve tribes of Israel, from a family whose father was Ephraim, the son of Joseph, and his father's name was Nun. When Joshua was born, his given name was Hosea, which means salvation, not Joshua, but he was called Joshua by Moses, as we learned last week. Joshua was appointed as one of the 12 scouting spies by Moses before the Israelites entered Canaan, the promised land. The scouting party sent to the land of Canaan was referred to as the head of Israel and seems to have been the leading group of the Israelites. After Joshua scouted out the land of Canaan, he came back reporting that he was going to attack the land. A man named Caleb also announced that he was going to attack the land of Canaan, but the other ten men said that they could not attack the land. God allowed only Joshua and Caleb and their generation to enter the land of Canaan. In this passage, the Israelites led by Joshua took over almost all of the land of Canaan, though there were some twists and turns, and after many years, the old Joshua called the leaders of Israel together, which was the beginning of the final message.

First, let's take a look at verses 1-2. **The years passed, and the Lord had given the people of Israel rest from all their enemies. Joshua, who was now very old, 2 called together all the elders, leaders, judges, and officers of Israel. He said to them, "I am now a very old man."** Already in verse 1, we are told what the Lord did for the people of Israel through Joshua. God said this to Joshua when the Israelites, led by Joshua, invaded the land of Canaan. Joshua 1:2-6: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.

³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. When Joshua and the Israelites crossed the Jordan River and entered Canaan, their first battle was to capture the city of Jericho. When the Lord told Joshua, "Behold, I have delivered Jericho, its king, and its valiant men into your hand," Joshua believed the Lord's promise and did what the Lord told him to do. Then the tightly closed walls surrounding the city of Jericho fell, rendering Joshua and his men victorious.

Next, let's take a look at verse 3. **You have seen everything the Lord your God has done for you during my lifetime. The Lord your God has fought for you against your enemies.**

Joshua was saying to the leaders of the Israelites that they were witnesses of what the Lord has done. The Israelites had won many victories over the Gentiles who had settled in the land of Canaan and had taken the land. But Joshua told them that it was not because the Israelites were strong or lucky, but because the Lord God had fought for them.

Let's take a look at verses 4 and 5 next. ⁴ I have allotted to you as your homeland all the land of the nations yet unconquered, as well as the land of those we have already conquered—from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ This land will be yours, for the Lord your God will himself drive out all the people living there now. You will take possession of their land, just as the Lord your God promised you.

Joshua faithfully obeyed the Lord's command and led the Israelites across the Jordan River to attack Jericho and all the way to the Mediterranean Sea, west of the land of Canaan. The land was assigned to each tribe by lot as their inheritance. The details of how the land was allocated are described in Joshua 13-19. However, other peoples were still living in the land that God was giving to the Israelites. Joshua told the leaders of Israel that the land was not yet occupied and that they should drive them out and occupy it.

Joshua was faithful to his plan to occupy the land that God Himself had promised to give to the people of Israel, but it wasn't an easy task. In chapters 7 and 8 of the book of Joshua, Joshua was about to attack the city of Ai. At that time, Achan, one of the Israelites, took for himself the gold and silver that had come out of the city when he attacked it. God was telling him to sanctify them, that is, to burn them up. Because of Achan's sin, the Israelites failed to take the city of Ai. Achan and his family were killed for their sin.

In spite of all this, why were the Israelites able to occupy the land? Was it because they were strong? No, they were far from strong. Was it the leadership of Joshua? No, not at all. The reason the Israelites were able to take over the land was that God had promised to give it to them. And God was faithful to be with them and fulfill His promise. Joshua was simply chosen by God and sent to be faithful to that promise.

When I see people like Joshua who are confident and faithful to the promises of God, I think of the life of a man named Hudson Taylor. His parents were Christians, but he didn't start believing in God until he was 17. But when he read his father's book on faith, his faith in God was renewed and he received a calling from God to go to the innermost part of China and preach the gospel. He was not a good speaker and was physically weaker than most people, so his mission to China was a series of failures. What helped him through the situation were these words from a letter from a friend, "How can we make our faith stronger? Not by striving to pursue faith, but by relying on the One who is faithful." He then experienced great persecution and the untimely death of a fellow missionary. He stayed in China for 51 years, and many people became Christians through the China Outback Mission he established. Now, the missionary organization that Hudson established in China has changed its name to OMF and is now sending missionaries all over the world. Through the faithful ministry of Hudson Taylor, China is now said to be the place where the largest number of Christians live in the world.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord fulfilled His promise to bring the people of Israel into the Promised Land through Joshua. Joshua was confident of God's promise that the Lord had told him, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you," and he trusted and went forward. If you believe that you have been saved through the atonement of the cross of Jesus, God will surely fulfill His promise to you. You may have struggles and failures in your current work and life. But if the Lord has shown you to do it, He will fulfill His promise to show His glory because He is faithful. We should go forward with confidence in God's promises. And if the promise is fulfilled, it is not your doing, but the Lord's doing. We need to humble ourselves, praise the Lord for His work, and walk confidently in His promises.

Secondly, in verses 6 through 10, Joshua tells the Israelites to rely on the Lord alone. We, too, should be relying on the Lord alone daily. First, please look at verses 6-7. ⁶ "So be very careful to follow everything Moses wrote in the Book of Instruction. Do not deviate from it, turning either to the right or to the left. ⁷ Make sure you do not associate with the other people still remaining in the land. Do not even mention the names of their gods, much less swear by them or serve them or worship them. ⁸ Rather, cling tightly to the Lord your God as you have done until now.

Verse 6 is Joshua's reminder to the Israelites of the Lord's words to him as he crossed the Jordan River. Joshua 1:7 "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go."

The Lord gave us the Book of the Law through the prophet Moses. Just as the Lord had told Joshua, Joshua also told the Israelites to keep the Law without deviating to the left or right. The Israelites, led by Joshua, were victorious against the other peoples who had settled in the Promised Land of Canaan. However, they were not free from temptation. In Exodus 23:22-33, the Lord strictly warns them not to worship foreign gods. In fact, in the land of Canaan that they occupied, there were many things that tempted them, such as peoples who were hostile to the Israelites and the gods that those hostile peoples worshipped. In verse 7, Joshua reminds them of the first half of the Ten Commandments that Moses received from God on Mount Sinai, so that they would not be distracted by other peoples' or pagan idols.

Let's continue looking at verses 8 through 10. ⁸ Rather, cling tightly to the Lord your God as you have done until now. ⁹ "For the Lord has driven out great and powerful nations for you, and no one has yet been able to defeat you. ¹⁰ Each one of you will put to flight a thousand of the enemy, for the Lord your God fights for you, just as he has promised.

Joshua told the leaders of the Israelites to hang on to the Lord their God. Why did he say this? Before Joshua and Caleb took over the Promised Land, they scouted it out and advised everyone to take over it while the other members of the scouting party were nodding in agreement that they could not. Joshua and Caleb obeyed God's Word, so they were able to enter and occupy the land of Canaan. Because they obeyed the Lord, there were no gentiles, kings, or nations that could stand against them. It was not because the Israelites were strong, or because they had devised a very clever strategy to challenge them in battle. The reason why the Israelites were able to continue to win and occupy the promised land was that the Lord God was faithful to the promises He had given them, Israel obeyed Him, and He was with them and fought with them.

What did Joshua want to tell the Israelites through these words in verses 6-10? It was to encourage the Israelites to simply rely on the Lord alone, no matter what their

circumstances were. Joshua knew from experience that when they obeyed and listened to the Lord and walked in obedience, the Lord would give them victory, and when they did not, that is, when they did not listen to the Lord, disobeyed the Lord, or tried to advance on their own, they would not be able to take the offensive and would have to pay the price for their blunder. Therefore, he strongly urged the remaining Israelites to rely on the Lord their God alone. In the next chapter, Chapter 24, Joshua publicly proclaimed the need to rely on the Lord alone, and urged the Israelites to do so.

Joshua 24:15

¹⁵ But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Six months after I entered the seminary, I hit a big wall. The wall made me wonder if it was God's will for me to continue my studies at the seminary. I wanted to get into the seminary and study the Bible, and I wanted to get good scores on tests and be evaluated. I thought I was going to master the Bible. I was treating the Bible like a textbook. What I was trying to do was just a foolish attempt. The thought of mastering the Bible made me impatient and I had no peace in my heart, but rather felt disturbed, stressed out. I had completely forgotten what was truly important.

I am not someone who could master God or the Bible. I was just a sinner who had been forgiven by God, and on the contrary, I realized that my heart needed to be mastered by God and the Bible. I stopped struggling with myself and said to the Lord, "I repent of my sin of trying to control you. Lord, have mercy and help me," I was led to pray. As I did so, my test scores went down, not up, but I felt something that had been stuck in my heart clearing up. I continue to face this kind of temptation to this day. However, I believe that I was taught how important it is to rely and depend more on God.

Brothers and sisters, as Joshua told the Israelites, we too need to rely on the Lord our God alone, no matter what circumstance or condition we are in. And the Lord also invites you to rely on Him alone. This situation of the Corona disaster will be a time of patience and difficulty for us. Truly, we are so weak that it is easy to fall into temptation at such a time. However, the Lord taught Joshua that the best way to go through life is to rely on the Lord alone. It is the same for us. We need to walk in the image of Joshua who depended on the Lord alone, and we too need to depend on the Lord alone.

Thirdly, by looking at what God did to Joshua, we should believe in Jesus Christ who pointed us to Him. Let's take a look at verses 11-13 ¹¹ So be very careful to love the Lord your God. ¹² "But if you turn away from him and cling to the customs of the survivors of these nations remaining among you, and if you intermarry with them, ¹³ then know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive them out of your land. Instead, they will be a snare and a trap to you, a whip for your backs and thorny brambles in your eyes, and you will vanish from this good land the Lord your God has given you.

In the latter part of the passage, Joshua sent a warning to the people of Israel who were able to occupy the Promised Land. The warning is, "If you do not love the LORD, if you do not rely on him, if you turn your back on him, if you sin before him, then the pagan people, the idols, whom you did not drive out, will judge the Israelites and destroy them, even though you were given the LORD's promised land. The Promised Land was given to the people of Israel by the Lord. However, the promised land was not a land where the Israelites could live in peace for the rest of their lives and not worry about anything.

Let's take a look at verses 14-16. ¹⁴ "Soon I will die, going the way of everything on earth. Deep in your hearts you know that every promise of the Lord your God has come true. Not a single one has failed! ¹⁵ But as surely as the Lord your God has given you the good things he promised, he will also bring disaster on you if you disobey him. He will completely destroy you from this good land he has given you. ¹⁶ If you break the covenant of the Lord your God by worshiping and serving other gods, his anger will burn against you, and you will quickly vanish from the good land he has given you."

Joshua was about to end his life on earth. In the end, he reminded the people of Israel of what the Lord has done, saying repeatedly that what the Lord has promised them has come true, word for word, and that they have been given the promised land. Joshua also reminded them that the Lord has indeed fulfilled His promises, and at the same time, he warned them that if they sin before the Lord, He will quickly destroy them.

It took decades for Joshua and the Israelites to take over the land that the Lord had promised them. You might say that the Lord was very harsh to the Israelites in that the land that was finally given to them, only to be destroyed just because they sinned. However, even Moses, who was called by the Lord, led the Israelites out of Egypt, and led them through the wilderness for 40 years, was not allowed to enter the promised land even though he saw it from afar, because of his sin of not revealing the holiness of the Lord. The Lord God is holy. There is no room for sin in Him. Unbelief in the Lord is also a great sin before the Lord.

After Moses and the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, his successor Joshua led the Israelites to the Promised Land, but it took decades for them to occupy it. While it took decades to occupy the Promised Land, it was only for a short while that the Israelites were able to settle in the Promised Land that Joshua had spent his life claiming. When will those who believe in God be able to find true security? But for those of us alive today, through the Joshua of the Bible, we are shown One who is far greater than Joshua. That is Jesus Christ.

The Bible invites you to see Jesus Christ as your Savior through the prophet Joshua. Joshua was one who pointed us to the coming Savior, Jesus Christ.

Joshua and Jesus have the same name, "The Lord is Salvation. Joshua faithfully obeyed the Lord and led the people of Israel to the promised land of Canaan. Jesus also faithfully obeyed God the Father and invited believers into the Kingdom of God. But there is a crucial difference. Joshua was in the promised land, but he could not completely drive out his enemies. Jesus, on the cross, paid for and forgave the sins of man, our enemy, and resurrected on the third day to win a complete victory over death. And He surely invited those who believe in Him into the Kingdom of God.

Brothers and sisters, we should believe in Jesus Christ, the perfect being, and perfect God, who is far better than Joshua, as pointed out to us through the very prophet Joshua. We should repent of our sins, be confident in the promises He has given us, and rely on Jesus Christ. Only the Lord God can transform us and lead us to our greatest happiness, the Kingdom of God.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we bless Your Name. We thank you, Lord, for the blessing of being able to look deeply at Jesus through the prophet Joshua, whom you sent. We thank you, Lord, that just as you fulfilled your promise to the Israelites through Joshua, you will fulfill your promise to us through Jesus. Help us to walk with confidence in your promises in the

midst of the violent turmoil of the world's values. Jesus also walked in obedience and submission to the Lord God. Jesus, You are the One Who can save us. Help us to look to You alone and ask You for help, no matter what we are going through. Lord, as we look to the prophet Joshua, we look up to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts that you have forgiven us and invited us into the kingdom of God through Jesus' atonement for our sins on the cross. Let us repent of the sins we have in our hearts every day and let us walk in faith in You who have paid for our sins. Lord, may we experience your blessing as we go through the week ahead. We pray in the name of our beloved Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.