

Joshua 23

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[0:00] Good evening, guys. It's good to see you and be gathered together with you. Take your Bibles, go into the book of Joshua, Joshua chapter 23, Joshua chapter 23. As we alluded to this morning, we're very quickly nearing the end of the book of Joshua.

This evening, we'll look at the 23rd chapter. As long as the Lord allows us to, we'll go into the 24th chapter on Wednesday, and that will conclude the book, and then we'll be transitioning into the book of Judges.

The latter parts of the book of Joshua really are comprised of three speeches. You find one in Joshua chapter 22 where he's admonishing or encouraging the two and a half tribes that he's sending back on the eastern side of the Jordan River, and he's encouraging them to remain faithful. It's a very short speech.

Then we have a speech contained in the 23rd chapter, and then, of course, the one that most of us are familiar with, Choose you this day whom you will serve as for me and my house. We will serve the Lord as a speech in the 24th chapter.

With these speeches, we see a progression. In the 22nd chapter, there's a speech to a small group within the nation. In the 23rd chapters, we'll see this evening, there's a speech given to the leaders of the nation.

[1:12] And in the 24th chapter, there's a speech to the entire nation. So these are the paths that we have set before us, and we'll see them. So that's why we read these large sections of Scripture in their entirety.

So we will be looking at Joshua chapter 23 this evening. Let's open up with a word of prayer, and then we'll get right into the text. Lord, we thank you for the opportunity of gathering, and we thank you for the privilege of looking at your word.

And, Lord, as we open the pages of Scripture, we pray that you would speak to us. God, we pray that the truth of Scripture would resonate within our hearts and minds, and, Lord, that the application of it would be lived out in our daily life.

Lord, we ask that you would give us wisdom. You would give us understanding. Lord, as we look at passages of Old Testament truth, we pray that we would see the historical reality, but also see the daily application.

Lord, may these things be glorifying and honoring to you, and we ask it all in Jesus' name. And amen. Joshua chapter 23. Some have said this is kind of the last will and testament of Joshua.

[2:19] He is nearing the very end of his life. We find out later on in the 24th chapter, he's 110 years of age when he dies. He does not live to the age of Moses, but rather he's just a little 10 years shy of that.

But we see here he is giving his final words of encouragement. We do not know where the events of the 23rd chapter actually take place. We do know in the 24th chapter that he calls the entire nation to himself at Shechem.

Shechem is a very important place historically in the nation of Israel. We know that they've already been there once within the pages of the book of Joshua. After the defeat of Ai, they went to Shechem, and they renewed their covenant to set up the stones of testament that are there, the stone of blessing and the stone of cursing.

We do not know if the events in the 23rd chapter happened at Shechem, or if they maybe took place at Joshua's place of residence, which would have been his place of inheritance that were distributed to him in a division of the land.

But either way, we do know that this is a speech directed to the leaders of the nation, those who would be making decisions as they move forward. These things should resonate within us as we move forward in Scripture, because we would turn the pages, and we will open up in the book of Judges, and we will read of events historically that take place when a generation rises up who does

not know Joshua or those who are with him.

[3 : 39] And we are told that the events in the book of Judges are really rooted in the reality that these people did not know what took place in Joshua's life, or what took place in the leader's life, that another generation rose up, and that when that generation rose up, men began to seek after their own ways and their own plans and their own purposes, rather than seeking after the things of the Lord.

This is what Moses was alluding to when he gave his farewell address, that it should be passed on to the generations to come, that the people should remain faithful. This is what Joshua is alluding to in his farewell address, that the people should remain faithful, and that the generations to come should hear of the faithfulness of God and see the faithfulness of God's people.

So I want you to see tonight in Joshua chapter 23 a parting admonition to faithfulness, a parting admonition or encouragement. He is admonishing the leaders here to remain faithful.

Throughout the book of Joshua, we have seen that faith secures the victory. There are a lot of themes that we can find in passages of Scripture, but really Joshua is a book that is themed upon faith.

By faith they crossed the Jordan River. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down. By faith in which they dealt with the sin of Achan, they went back and defeated the king of Ai. By faith they went to Shechem and raised the two stones, and they by faith had a worship service.

[5 : 05] By faith they defeated the southern kingdoms. By faith they defeated the northern kingdoms. By faith they inhabited the land which God had promised to them so many years ago and promised it to Abraham.

By faith they divided up the lands because they literally cast lots for it. The drawing of the straws is of men, but the lot falls into the lap of the Lord. So by faith they were trusting that God would give the right piece of property to the inhabitants of the land.

And by faith they are now living within that possession. And throughout the book of Joshua, we see that faith is that which secures the victory. And here we have this admonition to remain faithful.

It is for the leaders to take and to pass on to the people. We will see this same encouragement in the 24th chapter to an entire nation. But here we're dealing emphatically or specifically with the encouragement to the leaders.

It says in Joshua chapter 23, Now it came about after many days when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies on every side. And Joshua was old, advanced in years.

[6 : 07] That Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, their heads, and their judges, and their officers, and said to them, I am old, advanced in years. And 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 been fighting for you. See, I have apportioned to you these nations which remain as an inheritance for your tribes. With all the nations which I have cut off from the Jordan, even to the great sea, toward the setting of the sun.

The Lord your God, he will thrust them out from before you and drive them from before you. And you will possess their land just as the Lord your God promised you. Be very firm then to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses.

So that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left. So that you will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you. Or mention the name of their gods. Or make anyone swear by them.

Or serve them. Or bow down to them. But you are to cling to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day. For the Lord has driven out great and strong nations from before you.

[7 : 12] And as for you, no man has stood before you to this day. One of your men puts to flight a thousand. For the Lord your God is he who fights for you, just as he promised you. So take diligent heed to yourselves to love the Lord your God.

For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you. And intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you. Know with certainty that the Lord your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you.

But they will be a snare and a trap to you. And a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes. Until you perish from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you.

Now behold today, I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God has spoken concerning

you has failed.

All have been fulfilled for you. Not one of them has failed. It shall come about that just as all the good words which the Lord your God spoke to you have come upon you.

[8 : 16] So the Lord will bring upon you all the threats until he has destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you. When 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 burn against you and you will perish quickly from off the good land which he has given you. Joshua chapter 23. Over and over again we are reminded that the promised land is a good land. When God promised Abraham a land he told him he would give his people a good land. Moses speaks of a good land that they are going to.

He encourages them as they go into that good land that they would inhabit and remain faithful. And here Joshua reminds us that this is a good land because as the book of James tells us be not deceived. Every good and perfect gift comes from above.

That which God gives is good. So we cannot blame the fall or the failures of man upon the place in which they resided. Because God gave them something good. He gave them a good place to live and yet they failed even in his goodness.

[9 : 19] But we see this parting admonition to faithfulness which is given to the leaders of the nation. And we see that it comes to them so that they may stay true to what God has commanded them to do. And this really has an application even for our own time because we see it in our present day circumstances.

Because the events which takes place in the nation of Israel as we go into the book of Judges. And then we go into the historical writings and we find this slippery slope in which the nation continues to fall down. And we find them getting further and further and further away from the Lord their God. Until eventually everything that Moses said would come about and now everything that Joshua says will come about. These things do come about in the Babylonian captivity. We find that the events that take place there are the same events in which we see taking place today.

Namely, how do God's people go from being a set apart people to being assimilated people. To being people who are set apart living differently and looking differently and behaving differently. So that all may know the Lord their God to being those who look so much like the rest of the world. Because it is not in our assimilation in which we make the greatest difference.

[10 : 24] It is really in our separation in which we begin to impact that which is around us. And when God put his people in this good land. He put them in this land and set them apart.

But yet eventually what takes place is they begin to assimilate with the people around them. And they begin to look similar to the people around them. They begin to behave like the people around them.

And all of a sudden they are removed from this land because they are just like the people around them. It is that slippery slope in which they are encouraged to stay away from. And the only way to stay away from it is by faithfulness.

We see three encouragements here. Three truths that we want to hold on to. Number one there is the triumph of the past. Joshua calls them to them and he is honest about his own personal circumstances.

Right? He says I am old. I am advanced in years. Essentially what he is saying is I am about to die. He says I am about to go the way of all the earth. So he knows at the end of his days he has run his course. His task is completed.

[11 : 22] God had called him to be the man that would lead them into the land and to divide the land. He has done this. And now he knows that his mission is almost over. That his ministry is about to be through.

That he is now giving this last and final word to the nation. And he will give it to the leaders first and then to the nation. And he is encouraging them to not necessarily mimic him.

But to remain faithful to him who called them. And it is the Lord their God. And when Joshua calls them to himself. He does not begin to go into this long discourse of everything which Joshua has done.

He does not talk about his exploits. He does not talk about his leadership. He does not talk about his faithfulness. Oh I was one of the two spies who came back with a good word. He does not say

that. He does not talk about how he met the captain of the Lord's army.

And how he did this. And how he did that. Rather when he begins to encourage them. He encouraged them with everything that the Lord their God had done for them in the past. He says remember how the Lord your God fought for you.

[12:17] How he won the victories for you. How he pushed the people out. He points back to the faithfulness of God. Because friend listen to me. The faithfulness in the present and in the future always stands on past faithfulness of God.

It stands in the past realities of what God has done for us. And it encourages us to live presently for him in faithfulness. And in the future moving forward in faithfulness. While we understand that faith is not based on the things which are seen.

We also know that faith is not blind. It is the evidence of things unseen. And the evidence we have are the past faithfulness of God to his people. And we stand upon the evidences of what God has done for us.

To encourage us to be faithful to him in the present. And it is exactly what Joshua does. Joshua begins to remind them of all of the triumphs. Which they have experienced because of God's greatness.

He reminds them how God had led them and fought for them. And how these nations that were bigger than them were pushed out. He does not give any of this triumph. Any of these victories credit to himself or to the nation.

[13:21] He reminds them that it is God who is doing all of these things. He is continuing to move. And as we have seen over and over and over again. One of the grand themes throughout scripture. Is the man or the woman which God uses may pass from the scene.

But the one who is doing the work never fades. Right? Joshua knows that the end of his life is coming. And here by reminding them of past triumphs. He is not showing them they won the victory because of who he is.

That is Joshua. But rather because of who the Lord their God is. Right? That while Joshua may be leaving. The Lord their God remains the same. The victories are just as certain in the future as they have been in the past.

Because though the leader may be changing. He who is king over all is unchanging. This is the great hope of Christianity. This is the great hope of all those who stay true to Christ.

That though the man or the woman that God may be using in history is changing. The God who is doing the work in history never changes. Well probably one of the classic examples of that that I've read.

[14:26] Just from what you would call modern day history. Is there was a gentleman by the name of Billy Sunday. Billy Sunday was a professional baseball player in our own nation. And came to Christ as a direct result of some of those sawdust trail.

They called it the sawdust trail camp meetings where they would put up those tents and put sawdust on the floor. And they would put chairs in there and they would have these revivals. And Billy Sunday came to faith in one of those revivals.

Ended up leaving the professional baseball league. And became a very flamboyant pastor and preacher and evangelist. And so much so you think that I move. Billy Sunday was known for standing on top of the pulpit and jumping off.

Or standing in chairs. And he was just very not charismatic. He just got into his preaching. The vigor and the excitement that he had in the ball field and other venues of life. Was just really carried over into the ministry.

And really did a lot of work. As a matter of fact when he began being evangelist. He would go into cities and they would see this great decrease in the sale of alcohol. And an amazing increase in the sale of bibles.

[15:27] It said historically that everywhere Billy Sunday left. The sales of the bibles increased like a hundred fold. While the sale of alcohol would decrease. And bar owners were getting mad because it seems the bars were having to close down.

But the bibles couldn't be printed fast enough. Because people were responding to his message. When it got to the end of his life. There was this great concern that the work of God would stop. In North Carolina on a dairy farm.

Somewhere in North Carolina there was a dairy farmer who had called some other farmers over. And these farmers were having a prayer meeting in the middle of their dairy farm. Right behind the house. And the one farmer that was praying is God who's going to be the next Billy. Who's going to be the next Billy. Because Billy Sunday had just died. And the great call was who's going to be the next Billy. Well the man that was praying that was Billy Graham's dad. And at that time Billy Graham was not a believer. And he ended up attending a tent revival meeting coming to Christ. And as they say the rest is history. And it just shows us that God always has his Billy.

[16:31] Right? Because it's not the Billy Sundays or the Billy Graham's. Or the D.L. Moody's. Or the Charles Spurgeon's. Or the Lottie Moon's. Or the whoever you want to say.

God's always got his people. The triumph in the past is not a result of the Joshua's or the Moses's or the Billy Sundays. It's the Lord our God who's won the victory.

And Joshua reminds them of this. Because this is what I have found. We will stay faithful for a little while. When that faithfulness is directed towards a man.

Or a woman. An individual. But the moment they begin to fade and pass out of the scene. Our faithfulness begins to wane. But when our faithfulness is rested in the reality that God remains the same.

That it is not upheld by man's position or by man's place. And we rest it really in the fact that it is God doing the work. That is the encouragement to move forward in faithfulness.

[17:37] So Joshua starts with the triumphs of the past. Reminding them it is not me. But it's him who calls you.

Loves you. Leads you. And fights for you. And they need to hear this. And they need to understand that. The second thing we see are the trials of the present. We read this kind of oxymoron in the passage.

It says that the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies on every side. Which means the military campaign has stopped. The distribution of the land has taken place.

They're no longer going out in battle array and picking fights and pushing out people. Because the military campaign at this point in time is over. The Lord has given them rest. They occupy the land. There's no longer this threat that they will not be able to live in the good land. Now they occupy the land. But when we read down just a little bit further. We find this reality. That while the Lord their God had given them rest on all sides.

[18:38] Joshua always says I have appointed the nations which remain to you. That just because they were in the land doesn't mean the enemy wasn't present too.

Right? He said there are these nations which remain among you. So I have apportioned it says in verse 4. For to you these nations which remain as an inheritance for your tribes.

With all the nations which I have cut off from the Jordan even to the great sea toward the setting of the sun. The Lord your God he will thrust them out from before you and drive them from before you. And you will possess their land just as the Lord your God has promised you.

Now let's go back. Because God had counted unto destruction or reckoned unto destruction every inhabitant in the land of Canaan. Not because God is a big mean vengeful God. But because of the sins of the inhabitants of Canaan.

Right? Because of their wickedness. Because of their failure to worship him. Because of their failure to understand who he is. Because of their idolatry and their false worship.

[19:37] All of those things had led them to this place of appointed destruction. The day of judgment had come. So all the inhabitants of the land are reckoned as to destruction or to judgment.

Yet we have this problem. This problem is that God's people now reside in the land. They have rest on every side while residing in the land. But also the enemy is still in the land.

Now when we read later on in the Bible. We find in the prophetic books that God allowed the nations to remain to test the faithfulness of his people.

Kind of what Paul would call a thorn in the flesh. Right? Something that's a problem. But here we read this trial that was taking place in the present.

Joshua said you have rest on every side but you also have an enemy present among you. And the God who delivered you in the past is going to be the God who continues to push them. Out in the presence.

[20 : 35] And as he pushes them out you're going to take their land. Because just because you're living in it doesn't mean you possess all of it. Accepting Christ is the beginning of our walk not the end result of our walk.

Right? And when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior we are at the beginning not at the end. And we don't yet possess. We are occupying salvation but we do not yet possess all that salvation entails.

Because we find out in scripture that there's so much more in our salvation that entails than just going to heaven. Right? And we don't yet possess all of that. There's this sanctification process where he continues to mold and shape us and move and form us to who he would like us to be. And yet we see this trial that is present. And the trial is the presence of the enemies among them. Now the encouragement is to stay faithful you have to push them out.

Because you want to possess the land in which they live. The danger is this. The longer you live beside them the more you get used to them.

[21 : 36] And we see this progression. He says in verse 6. Be very firm then. To keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses.

Stay true. Stay faithful. Do everything that you've been commanded to do. So that you do not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left. And look at this progression. Just follow with me if you will.

So that you will not associate with these nations. The first danger will be like. You know what? We've been here long enough. They're not that bad of people. They look a lot like us. They behave a lot like us.

As a matter of fact their houses look like ours. You know why? Because they built our houses. We're living in houses we did not build. And eating from gardens we did not plant. And drinking from wells we did not dig. They're just like us. Right? So now you associate with them.

He says. And then these nations remain among you. And you mention the name of their gods. And all of a sudden now you think they're okay. And you begin to mention the names of their gods. Oh well. Well we worship the true God. But they have these other gods.

[22 : 37] And you begin to mention their names. And then the progression just continues on. All of a sudden you begin not just to associate with them. And mention their names. And then you're swearing by the names of their gods. And all of a sudden you're intermarrying with their sons and their daughters.

Because they look a lot like us. There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with them. They behave a lot like us. And then all of a sudden you begin to worship their gods. And you begin to go down that slippery slope.

That no longer are you a distinct and separate people for the Lord your God. Rather you are an assimilated people among those whom God had reckoned unto destruction. The trial of the present was the presence of the enemy.

And rather than staying faithful and true to the Lord their God. They began to be like their enemy. Friend listen to me. In our day and time. The lines between wrong and right are continuously getting blurred.

The absolute standard of absolute truth seems to no longer be there. There's what is true to you or what is true to me. There seems to be no clear distinction between right and wrong.

[23 : 50] Between immoral and moral. Between acceptable and unacceptable. Between we should or should not. There seems to be this very blurred distinction of what exactly is expected.

In even our understanding of scripture. And I'm not even talking about in society. I'm talking about in church. Because one of the things we need to understand.

Is when we live among them long enough. Man is never the issue. We wrestle not against flesh and blood. I want you to stay with me in this.

Okay. Those enslaved into a lifestyle of sin. The people are not the problem.

The sin is the problem. Listen. There are people living very sinful lives. Sinful by choice. Of things which God calls an abomination.

[24 : 52] Which are good people. Likeable. Lovable people. And the danger becomes. When we as believers. Begin to separate.

Not to. To identify the sin with the people. And we begin to think. Well there's nothing wrong with those people. The Bible tells us. To save the people. Snatching them out of the fire.

Hating the sin. Our hatred is never to be geared towards individuals. But rather the sin. Which has them. Entrapped. And when we begin to.

Say. They seem to be okay. I like that. I don't have a problem with them. And then we begin to. Put them and their sin together. And we begin to.

Accept the sin. Because we accept the person. Now all of a sudden. We're treading on dangerous ground. We begin to mention the name of their God. Because we've associated with them.

[25 : 48] I'm not talking about isolation. Listen. I've never thought that a believer. Needs to isolate himself. I mean. Don't put me in a monastery. I'll go nuts. Right? We need to be salt and light. We need to be in the world.

Salt has to be in the world. Has to be among the world. Light has to be on the hilltop. We have to be in the world. Shining light into the darkness. But we also need to have a clear understanding.

Of right and wrong. Of truth and error. Of scriptural mandates. And the wickedness of sin. Because Baal didn't look too bad in this family over here.

But when you get to the very depth of it. And you understand that they're building golden calves. And they're starting to fire in it. And they're putting their kids in the belly of that fire. And they're burning their kids alive. That looks a little worse.

See. There's a slippery slope that we get to. If we're not careful. That's the trial of the present. Is to. Remain faithful.

[26 : 53] Even in the presence. Of the enemies. The enemy is never man. The enemy is always sin. We get to the third thing.

And it is the truth. The truth of the future. The truth for the future. For the nation of Israel here. From the text. As Joshua has encouraged them. In verse 8. You are to cling to the Lord your God.

He says. In light of all of this. When you're going to be so tempted. To blend in. When you're going to be so tempted. To behave like. When you're going to be so tempted. To go with. Cling to the Lord your God.

The word cling there. By the way. Is the same word used in the New Testament. As a husband. Is to cling to his wife. Right. It is the same wording that we have. In our marriage relationship. This is why. When the nation of Israel sins.

God says. They had committed idolatry. Not only idolatry. They had played the harlot. Right. That they had been unfaithful to him. They are to cling to him. They are to cling to the Lord their God.

[27 : 49] In spite of the temptations to be like. In spite of the trials. In spite of the presence of the enemy among them. They were to cling. And this is why. He reminds them that God had been faithful.

And we see here. As we go down into verse 12. For if you ever go back. And cling to the rest of these nations. So if you fail to cling to the Lord your God.

If you ever go back. And you want to be like them. Then go down to verse 13. Know with certainty. That the Lord your God. Will not continue to drive these nations out from before you. If you want to be with them.

Know for certainty. If you fail to cling to the Lord your God. And you want to go over there. Then God's not going to move on your behalf. And then he goes into the 14th through 16th verse.

And he reminds them. In that 14th verse. And you know in all your hearts. And in all your souls.

That not one word of all the good words. Which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed.

[28 : 45] We've read that before. Right. Every good word which God said has come about. They all have been fulfilled for you. And not one of them has failed. That's a glory hallelujah. Right. All the good promises which God has given us.

They have come about. Not one good word has failed. But as many have said. The word of God is a double edged sword. So look at the other side of that sword.

It says in verse 15. It shall come about that just. As all the good words. Which the Lord your God spoke to you. Have come upon you. So the Lord will bring upon you all the threats.

Until he has destroyed you from off this good land. Which the Lord your God has given you. When 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 burn against you. And you will perish quickly from off the good land. Which he has given you. Here is the truth. That you move forward on. As a nation of Israel. Joshua tells them.

[29 : 44] All the good things God has promised you. Has come about. Not one single word. Which God has declared has failed. Every bit of it has come about. With certainty God has fulfilled his word.

But there is also. The rest of the words of God. Because just as certain was God's blessing. So is certain are his curses. So too.

If you choose not to cling to the Lord your God. Just as he brought about every good word. He also will bring about every bad word. Every curse. Every judgment. Every disciplinary action. Because the God who promises blessing. Is also the God who promises curses. The God who said he would do good to you. If you were faithful to him. Is also the God who declared that he would remove you. If you failed him.

The God who said that if you walked with him. He would drive the nations out from before you. Is also the God who said that if you went to the nations. That he would chastise you and remove you from the land. Friend listen to me. Believers love to name and claim all the promises of God.

[30 : 40] But what I have found in the name and claiming of the promises of God. Is we don't normally name and claim what God declares to be disciplinary actions to us. We like to say what he would do good for us.

But we don't like to claim how he says. He would discipline us. We don't like the Hebrews 10 passages. That it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.

That's just as certain as God will not fail us. We don't like the passages to declare that if we fail him or we continue to sin. Then he would discipline us. The Hebrews 12 passage which declares. That God like a good father. Disciplines his children. We don't like those. We would like the sunshine. The ones that say he's going to do us good.

We don't like the ones who say that he would discipline us. Because those whom he loves. He disciplines. If we want to claim the faithfulness of God to his word. Let's ensure that we are claiming his faithfulness to all his word.

[31 : 42] And if we understood that just as certain as he is to bring about the good. He is also just as certain to bring about the bad. If we fail to walk in faithfulness. He will keep his word.

And with that. We are encouraged. To move forward. Faithfully. Because just as he has blessed us. So too will he discipline us.

If we're not careful. Let's pray. Lord thank you for your word. Lord I thank you for the way you speak to our hearts and minds. Pray you continue to lead and guide each one of us for your glory. And we ask it all in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.