

Let's Worship God

15th-20th January 2018

Joshua

The Book of Joshua

THE PROMISED LAND



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Monday -Joshua 22:1-8 - A Gracious Commendation

Look back at 1:12-18, where today's passage relates to. There Joshua had charged the Israelites who had settled on the east of the Jordan - the Reubenites, the Gadites and half of Manasseh - to send their fighting men over into Canaan and to assist their brothers in conquering their territory (see 1:14, 15). The two-and-a-half 'East of Jordan' tribes had obeyed and now Joshua commended them: "You have kept all that Moses ... commanded you and have obeyed my voice ... You have not forsaken your brothers".

We have seen many failings in the people of God as we have studied through Joshua this far, but this passage shows us how beautiful obedience is. It reminds all of God's people that obedience really is an option! Choosing to obey, choosing not to sin, is an option available to us in every choice we face. "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin" (1 John 2:1). The people of God know all too well the grip and domination of sin, and sometimes in our struggle with sin we can wearily come to think that we are always doomed to lose the fight. But sin will not lord it over us, for we are under the influence of the King of Grace (see Rom. 6:14). Obedience is beautiful.

We should notice too that Joshua takes the time to commend these tribes. This is a lesson for pastors, elders, deacons and all who serve in the church. It's easy to be negative - to know the people who are hard work, to see the gaps or the problems in the congregation, to be aware of the difficulties. But there are those who are thoughtful and conscientious in checking on others; there are those who are upholding a steadfast witness; there are those who encourage other believers in times of trial. These people can gain fresh heart from a member or friend expressing gratitude for their labour done in love.

Questions

1. Why were these tribes commended?
2. What encouragement is there here for us in our struggle against sin?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for those in the church who labour for the Lord.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"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 23:3

Praise: Psalm 113A:all - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Tuesday - Joshua 22:9-20 - A Watchful Loyalty

In these verses we see the watchful, vigilant loyalty to God that the western tribes display. The 'East of Jordan' tribes returned home and built a giant altar. The 'West of Jordan' tribes heard about it and gathered together to make war against them. First, though, they sent a delegation to investigate the matter and express their alarm to the eastern tribes. But why was there such a fuss over building an altar? Deuteronomy 12 holds the answers. Israel was commanded to offer their sacrifices only "at the place that the LORD will choose" (Deut. 12:5, 13-14). "The place" stands opposed to "all the places" where the Canaanites had conducted their 'worship' orgies. Restricting sacrifices to one place was a precaution, intended to preserve the purity of Israel's worship. To simplify, it meant: one altar, one faith, one people. If such worship took place anywhere folks felt like 'experiencing God', then worship could very quickly take on a Canaanite colour, soak up Canaanite belief, adopt Canaanite practices and even adore Canaanite gods. In short, with one blow it would kill both devotion to the LORD and the unity of Israel.

So to the western tribes, hearing word of another altar suggested man-chosen worship and sacrifice. To them it stank of the first step towards abandoning the LORD. The western tribes stressed that unfaithfulness by some tribes would bring the LORD's anger against all Israel - as at Peor and with Achan. They knew that permitted sin brought judgement on all and that tolerated unfaithfulness was a spreading infection.

The church needs to show such passionate holiness and such infatuation for the true worship of God. We should be watchful for even hints of unfaithfulness among fellow believers. Joshua 22 shows why discipline by the elders can be necessary. The church is not a democracy, but operates under the kingship of Jesus - who has entrusted the care of His flock to elders who are to guard and protect its faithfulness.

Questions

1. Why did the western tribes have a problem with the eastern tribes building an altar?
2. How can we show such watchful loyalty to God?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for your ministers and elders.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

“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 23:3

Praise: Psalm 113B:all - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Wednesday - Joshua 22:21-29 - A Godly Anxiety

The 'East of Jordan' tribes had a godly anxiety for the pure worship of God. The western tribes had feared the altar showed their unfaithfulness; actually, said the eastern tribes, it was to prevent unfaithfulness to the LORD! The eastern tribes swore on oath that they had no unfaithful intention in building the altar, and called on God and His people to take vengeance if they had. The altar was because of their fear for the future. They were afraid that in a generation or so the western tribes would view the eastern tribes with disgust. They might view the Jordan as a Berlin wall and the eastern tribes as no part of the LORD's people. They could say the eastern tribes weren't really in the land of promise. The outcome could be that: "your children might make our children cease to worship the LORD".

This is worthy worry and proper anxiety - to care about your offspring being faithful to God and to take all necessary measures to make sure they can be. Israel teaches us here to communicate the faith to our children in diligent, interesting, persistent teaching; to pray with them and for them; to pray even for children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren not yet born! The 'East of Jordan' tribes were making this provision for the spiritual well-being of their descendants: if Israel ever suggested they had "no portion in the LORD", they could point to the altar their ancestors had erected just after the conquest. The altar was not for sacrifices but was intended as a witness.

The reactions of the west and the east in this incident, taken together, give us the right balance. The western tribes had argued that unity among God's people could not exist where there was unfaithfulness (v13-20). Now the eastern tribes feared that faithfulness could not exist without unity among God's people (v21-29).

Questions

1. What was 'East of Jordan' tribes' true reason for building the altar?
2. In what ways in our families or church can we show this same godly anxiety?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for the covenant children in the church.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"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 23:3

Praise: Psalm 114:all - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Thursday - Joshua 22:30-34 - A Satisfying Conclusion

In v30-34 this whole incident reaches a satisfying conclusion. Everyone seemed pleased and relieved. Phinehas the priest spoke on behalf of the 'West of Jordan' delegation: "Today we know that the LORD is in our midst, because you have not committed this breach of faith against the LORD. Now you have delivered the people of Israel from the hand of the LORD" (v31). The sign of the LORD's presence was that His people had been kept from falling and so had been kept from His judgement ("the hand of the LORD" - v31).

Phinehas both commended the eastern tribes and praised the LORD. Basically he says that we know God's presence when he protects us from his own judgment. That is exactly what happened at the cross too. How much more clearly can we know that God is for us than when He shields us from His own wrath and judgement by placing us under the shelter of His Son's cross?

The people of Israel were satisfied (v33). They blessed God that making war against their own people was no longer necessary. So they praised God for causing His peace to rule among His people.

The eastern tribes reaffirmed the intention behind their altar: "it is a witness between us that the LORD is God" (v34). In Old Testament faith there was no more crucial confession than 'The LORD is God' - just as 'Jesus is Lord' stands at the centre of the New Testament faith (see 1 Cor. 12:3). The flow of the story indicates that what they are really saying is: 'The LORD is our God as well as yours, and therefore we are one people'. This chapter declares that it is truth that unifies the people of God; apart from truth there can be no unity. Our desire should be that all conflicts between God's people would end with such clear evidence of His presence, His peace and His truth.

Questions

1. What lessons did Israel learn from this incident (see especially v31)?
2. What does this teach us about the only true basis for unity among God's people?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks that Christ has obtained peace for His people at the cross.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"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 23:3

Praise: Psalm 115:1-6 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Friday - Joshua 23:1-3 - The Special Responsibility of the LORD's Witnesses

In chapter 23 an aged Joshua addresses Israel through her leaders. His concern is that they remained 'psyched up'! It's one thing to be up for a (perhaps) five-year conquest; it's another thing completely to sustain that vigour and vision over the long haul, to finish the conquest and preserve its results.

In v1-3 Joshua sets himself in sharp contrast to Israel's leaders who remain: "I am now old and well advanced in years. And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done ..." (v2, 3). These men, who have seen the LORD's mighty work in the conquest and will outlive Joshua, bear a special responsibility to anchor Israel in spiritual faithfulness to God and to spur Israel on to total occupation of the land. This is a solemn time. Death is beckoning Joshua and he uses a last opportunity to make sure the pure worship of God survives beyond his time.

In Israel's case, a faithless generation will arise out of this faithful generation (look up Judges 2:7-10). This emphasises how vital it is for one generation to pass on the amazing story of God's saving power and fearful judgement to the next. While passing on the testimony of the LORD's deeds cannot guarantee the devotion of the next generation, the failure to pass it on will guarantee their unfaithfulness. This is the job of parents and families, not just the church.

Having seen "all that the LORD ... has done" for us, we too have this responsibility to pass it on. We may not have been there when the priest's feet touched the Jordan. We didn't hear the roar of Jericho's walls crumbling. We didn't hide in ambush at Ai or see the Beth-horon hailstones fall. But we have a record of it. And a record of a God who became flesh: One who perfectly kept God's law; One who became God-forsaken in our place; One who trampled all over death; One who reigns over the universe. This gives us a special responsibility.

Questions

1. What is the special responsibility given to Israel's leaders?
2. Why do we have the same special responsibility?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for all that God has done for you.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"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 23:3

Praise: Psalm 115:7-11 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Saturday - Joshua 23:3-5 - The Confident Assurance of the LORD's Help

In v3 Joshua refers to the LORD's help in the relatively recent past: "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". Then in v4-5 he anticipates the immediate future: "Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain ... 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".

This is the Bible's picture of the conquest of the Promised Land: a decisive conquest (v3) and a continuing occupation (v4-5). The LORD had given them rest (v1) but there was still work to do (v4-5). This is not a contradiction! God had told His people long before that there would be a gradual process to the conquest (see Ex. 23:29, 30).

Joshua's intention is to provide the people with a basis for confidence. He wants those who remain to be sure of the LORD's help. He grounds them in this assurance by appealing to the LORD's recent activity (v3) and to His previous promise (v5: "just as the LORD your God promised you"). Both God's action and His Word should support them. Anyone who had seen the LORD in combat at Jericho (ch.6), Ai (ch.8), Merom, Hazor and Beth-horon (ch.11), should be able to trust Him for the task that remained. And if God's promise had proven true to date, surely it was adequate for what lay ahead. Indeed Joshua does not stress Israel's bravery or prowess but exalts the LORD's power: "for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you" (v3) and "The LORD your God will ... drive them out of your sight" (v5).

This is the plain logic of faith. The confidence of the people of God comes from remembering His faithful actions and His faithful Word.

Questions

1. Why was there still some conquering for Israel to do?
2. What two things should give them (and us) confidence?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for the preaching and hearing of God's Word tomorrow.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"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 23:3

Praise: Psalm 116:1-6 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

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