

Let's Worship God

22nd-27th January 2018

Joshua

The Book of Joshua

THE PROMISED LAND



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Monday - Joshua 23:6-13 - The Careful Obedience of the LORD's People

The bulk of chapter 23 concerns the careful obedience of the LORD's people. Joshua addresses their leaders (v2) as representatives of the people, so his demands are of every single Israelite.

Their standard of obedience is the Word of God (v6). The same demand is here placed on all the people as had been placed on Joshua at the beginning of his leadership (look back at 1:7-8). There is not a higher level of obedience expected from ministers or leaders than the members of the church! All God's people owe obedience to His law.

Israel's obedience was to take the form of separation (v7, 8). Mingling with the Canaanites would make their beliefs more easily available to Israel and their practices would soon seem more natural. Separation from sin and wickedness remains part of our obedience today. Obedient separation is often difficult and painful, but the difficulties do not undo the command. We cannot be taken out of the world but we must be kept from the evil one (John 17:15).

Joshua also set out to motivate the people to obedience: seeking to motivate Israel by the grace of God (v9, 10) and also appealing to the fear of God (v11-13). V9, 10 summarise what the LORD had done for Israel in the past. So Israel's faithful obedience should be a response of gratitude for the LORD's recent goodness. V11-13 warn Israel that if they turn away and cling to the other nations instead of the LORD, then He would no longer enable them to complete the conquest. Those nations would be "a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes" (v13). Just as Joshua argues from the memory of the LORD's goodness, he also appeals to the threat of the LORD's judgement. Both the grace of God and the fear of God should motivate the people of God to obedience.

Questions

1. How would the Israelites know what obedience was expected of them?
2. How did Joshua try to motivate their obedience? How can this help us to obey?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that you would grow in obedience.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15b

Praise: Psalm 116:7-13 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Tuesday - Joshua 23:14-16 - The Utter Certainty of the LORD's Judgement

At v14 Joshua hits the climax of this chapter's address. He reminds those who will survive him of the thorough faithfulness of the LORD. All His promises had been kept in detail (v14). Israel's leaders - and readers today - would probably have loved the address to end on that high note! But Joshua goes on to say that, just as they had enjoyed the LORD's promised benefits, He would also bring disaster on them if they were unfaithful in following Him (v15, 16).

What an impact these words would have had - especially as it seemed like Joshua's address was reaching a happy ending! Joshua preached that God's faithfulness is a two-edged sword. He is faithful in grace and He is also faithful in judgement. His dependability is not just seen in covenant blessing but in covenant cursing too, by which He shows that He never lets go of His people but will pursue them even in their sins. He is not a tame, safe God. He is faithful to heal and to destroy.

Probably we (and they) would have preferred Joshua to end this chapter on a more positive note. The account of this occasion began with the LORD's rest but ends with the LORD's wrath. We may prefer happy endings, but there's nothing wrong with an unhappy ending if it leads us to faithfulness. Scripture always holds out to us both "the kindness and the severity of God" (Rom. 11:22). We forget either one at our own risk.

It would be easy for us to look on proudly at Israel at this point. We could say: 'Well, that was Israel - rarely faithful, always needing judgement'. We need to remember who we are. Non-Israelites like us have been grafted into God's Jewish olive tree (Rom. 11). Some of the natural Jewish branches were broken off because of their unbelief, but we stand firm only by faith (see Rom. 11:20). So there is no room for smugness. "If God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you" (Rom. 11:21). Joshua 23 is not just for Israel.

Questions

1. What are the two sides of God's faithfulness?
2. What warning is there for us in the 'unhappy ending' to Joshua's address?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for the salvation of family and friends.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15b

Praise: Psalm 117A:all - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Wednesday - Joshua 24:1-13 - Reviewing God's Grace

This is a historic, sacred moment. In the third of these three great assemblies that conclude the book of Joshua (ch.22-24), he speaks to all the people (v2). First he proclaims a review of covenant history, focusing on crisis points and threats to Israel's welfare - each of which is met by the LORD's intervention.

We start with their forefather Abraham (v2, 3) who, like his family circle, "served other gods" (v2). We can sometimes think of heroes of the faith like Abraham as having been perfect material for God's choosing. But grace really is amazing! Abraham "served other gods ... then I took ... Abraham ..." (v2, 3). Abraham rose out of the awful pit of paganism because the LORD touched him. The fact that, by Joshua's time, there even is 'a people of God' at all is because of God's simple good pleasure.

God in His grace had brought His people to their inheritance, despite initially it having seemed that the ungodly - the descendants of Esau - received theirs but the godly - the descendants of Jacob - did not (v4). God in His grace had displayed awesome power in delivering them from slavery, plagues, pursuers, seas, enemy kings, and armies (v5-8). God in His grace had shielded them from a crooked prophet who an enemy king tried to pay to curse them (v9, 10). God in His grace provided constantly for His people - whether in the wilderness (v7) or in the Promised Land.

Yet again, at a crucial turning point in the history of God's people they are being reminded of His abundant, amazing "grace upon grace" (John 1:16). He says: 'Remember how I took you as my own; how I baffled you with my love; rescued you in your helplessness; how I shielded you from dangers seen and unseen; how I have sustained you with food to eat until this very day?' And how gracious He was to remind Israel, at such a vital moment, of His relentless grace! And today He is reminding us too.

Questions

1. What's the point of a history lesson at this stage?
2. Review in your own mind (and prayers) some of God's gracious dealings with you recently.

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for God's mercy and grace to you.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15b

Praise: Psalm 117B:all - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Thursday - Joshua 24:14-24 - A Demand for Covenant Commitment

In this section, Joshua presses the demand for Israel's commitment to the LORD. His demand is for an exclusive commitment but also for a cautious commitment. Following on from reviewing God's grace (v1-13), a call for wholehearted commitment to God is unavoidable. So in v14 Joshua says: "Now ..." There is no doubt that total and exclusive commitment to the LORD is what Joshua is after. Read v14 and v15 again and count how many times the word 'serve' appears. 'Serve' (or words drawn from it) occur 18 times in ch.24! Israel must decide whose slaves they will be.

Joshua seems to do a strange thing. His famous 'choose this day' command (v15) calls Israel to choose between two sets of pagan gods! If we back up to v14 they are told to serve the LORD - but if not, he says, at least choose some gods. Is Joshua being serious here? How could the choice between the old pagan gods of their ancestors (see v2, 3) or the current pagan gods of their neighbours really be an option? Exactly! Joshua is trying to show them how ridiculous it is. He says: 'Serve the LORD; but if not, choose which non-god you'll serve'. We might say: 'But that's stupid! Choosing between pagan non-gods is absurd!' And Joshua would say: 'Precisely. Rejecting the LORD is stupid, and the only remaining options make no sense at all'.

Joshua also calls for a cautious commitment. He tells the Israelites they cannot serve God and that He won't keep on forgiving rebellion and sins if they turn away from Him. Joshua is telling them not to lightly profess to follow God. Realise the God you're dealing with. He is a holy and jealous God. Jesus told people who would want to follow Him to count the cost (Luke 14:25-33). Joshua was urging caution. His purpose is not to drive us away from the LORD but to Him. Yet we must not make our commitment easily, lightly, flippantly - but cautiously and reverently.

Questions

1. What does Joshua demand from the people of God in these verses?
2. What is Joshua trying to do when he tells the people that they cannot serve God?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that you would serve God wholeheartedly.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15b

Praise: Psalm 117C:all - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Friday - Joshua 24:25-28 - The Wonder of a Covenant God

These verses may not immediately strike us as being full of wonder. They contain certain expected elements of a covenant renewal ceremony: probably a sacrifice (v25 literally says that Joshua 'cut' a covenant with the people); a written document (v26) and a witness (v26, 27). Pagan treaties or agreements of the day summoned their various gods as witnesses. Biblical faith doesn't recognise these 'gods', so the heavens and earth - and even stones - will have to do as witnesses! (See Isaiah 1:2 and Micah 6:2 for examples)

These verses are full of wonder, however! The place this covenant renewal took place is significant. V25 tells us it was at Shechem; v26 refers to "the sanctuary of the LORD". Our minds are supposed to be drawn back to Gen. 12:6, 7 (have a look at those verses). It was at Shechem that God had issued the first of His covenant promises to Abraham ("To your offspring I will give this land"). Now, about 600 years later, Abraham's offspring are at 'Promise Place' - Shechem - in possession of that land. Truly, none of the LORD's promises failed (21:45; 23:14).

And yet the greatest wonder is that there is any covenant at all - that such an awesome, amazing God as the One we have seen in Joshua would speak His covenant promise ("I will be your God and you will be my people" e.g. Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12) to any people! Especially a people who behave like Israel have at times so far between Exodus and Joshua. In the ancient world, covenant agreements existed between kings and other nations they subjected. Or covenants existed between equals. But where else do we hear of a God who binds Himself by covenant to a people? Only the God of the Bible. Our knees should bend in worship. "Who is a God like you?" (Micah 7:18)

Questions

1. What is the significance of this ceremony taking place at Shechem?
2. What encouragement does God's covenant-making and covenant-keeping give you?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks that God keeps His promises.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

"But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15b

Praise: Psalm 118:1-6 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Saturday - Joshua 24:29-33 - Where Are They Now?

These verses seem like a dry way to end an otherwise exciting Biblical book. Why chose an obituary column as a conclusion? These burials are probably placed at the end of the book to underline some key concerns.

Again the reliability of God's promises is emphasised. Notice where Joshua, the bones of Joseph, and Eleazer are said to be buried (v30, 32, 33) - each one of them in the land that God had promised them. Joseph had died in Egypt but was now buried in the Promised Land (see Gen. 50:25, 26). The tombstones of these men were monuments to the faithfulness of God to His promise of the land - one of the great themes of the whole book of Joshua.

The passage hints at a test for the LORD's people. V31 records faithfulness but hints at wavering. The deaths of Joshua and Eleazer represent the passing of that great 'conquest generation'. What now for Israel? Will they still serve the LORD once Joshua, Eleazer the priest (see 14:1), and the elders were gone? The book of Judges follows this and paints a bleak picture of what happens next (see Judges 2:10). How will our church respond when the current leaders are gone? Faithfulness or wavering?

We also see in this section the need for the LORD's victory. The graves of these men do mark the LORD's promise-keeping faithfulness, but there is also an incompleteness - a sense of tragedy - as the close of the book is marked by deaths. Genesis ends with Joseph's death; Deuteronomy ends with Moses' death; now Joshua ends with his death. Surely this is a reminder of the sting of sin in the midst of the faithfulness of God. How wonderful it is that, in contrast, each of the Gospels end with resurrection rather than death (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24 and John 20-21). For all the triumphs in the book of Joshua, it still ends with death. But Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death.

Questions

1. Why are we told where these men are buried?
2. What should we do now to ensure our church stands firm?

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

“But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:15b

Praise: Psalm 118:7-12 - 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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