

ENTER AT YOUR OWN REST

Studies in the Book of Joshua

“Full blessing in the Christian life is not bestowed except to eager, hungry people who press in to receive it”

Alan Redpath

Text

Joshua 23:1-16

Topic

Joshua, now an old man, gathers together the leaders of Israel to speak to them about remaining faithful to the Lord after his death

Title

“The Old Man & the Speech”

Introduction

You hear it at almost every Christian wedding: “A man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” (Genesis 2:24). It is the benediction God spoke at the marriage of the very first couple.

‘Leaving’ and ‘cleaving’ have thus become forever associated with marriage.

As a result you’re a little surprised by what Joshua says in verse eight - provided you read it in the KJV:

Joshua 23:8 (KJV) But **cleave** unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day.

Their relationship with the Lord was being likened to a marriage. They had left the world behind and should continue to “cleave unto the Lord.”

The marriage-metaphor is our point of contact with this chapter. Your relationship with the Lord is in the New Testament also compared to a marriage:

- Christians are described as being engaged to Jesus Christ.
- The Holy Spirit is described as an engagement promise.
- When Jesus returns it will be as a Bridegroom for His bride.

We're encouraged to remain faithful to Jesus until our marriage in eternity. We're expected to leave the world behind and cleave to the Lord.

Joshua emphasized two traits the Israelites would need in order to leave and cleave. They are courage and carefulness. It makes sense that we should emphasize them, too.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 It Takes Courage For You To Leave The World, and #2 It Takes Carefulness For You To Cleave To The Lord.

#1 It Takes Courage For You To Leave The World (v1-10)

What do we even mean when we say, "leave the world?" It sounds a little weird. Isn't that what the Heaven's Gate people thought they were going to do? They believed a spaceship was following in the tail of the Hale-Bop comet. They committed mass suicide in order to book passage on it and leave the world.

The word "world" in the New Testament is the Greek word *cosmos*. It means *order* or *arrangement*. For example, it's the word we get cosmetics from. Cosmetics bring order to your face by arranging it the way you want!

Our use of the term is specific. The apostle John wrote,

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world.

John also identified Satan as the ruler of this "world," of this "cosmos" (John 12:31). When we say "the world" we mean the current reality on the earth as ruled over by Satan.

When you leave the world you don't go anywhere but, rather, everywhere you go you have a new, a heavenly, perspective on what is really happening. Our new heavenly perspective can be summarized by saying we are in the world but not of the world.

The Israelites had left the world in the sense they had crossed over into their own land. Still there were enemies and enemy strongholds in their land that needed to be dealt with. And they were bordered by nations antagonistic to them and to God.

If you are a Christian you've been born-again. Your very body has become the dwelling place of God. Still there are enemies and enemy strongholds within you. You find the flesh struggling against the Spirit. And you are surrounded by a world antagonistic to you and to God. It is therefore accurate to describe yourself as leaving the world as you do spiritual battle each and every day.

What's the one thing you need to go on leaving the world? Joshua said it was courage:

Joshua 23:6 Therefore be very **courageous** to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left,

You'll need spiritual courage to go on leaving the world. Let's see how we muster it.

Joshua 23:1 Now it came to pass, a long time after the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age.

Joshua 23:2 And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them: "I am old, advanced in age.

The first thing I note is that God had given the Israelites an example to bolster their courage. Joshua had lived a life of victory. From his time as a slave in Egypt, to his serving Moses, to his spying out of the Promised Land, to his forty years wandering in the desert, to his leading the conquest of the Promised Land - he had been a man who in every sense was leaving the world behind to pursue his Lord.

The Bible men and women we encounter in its pages are each an example to us of folks of like temperament who nevertheless left the world to follow

the Lord. Their successes and even their failures give us courage to do the same.

It's been said that God does His best work through men who are either asleep or dead!

- Adam's best work was when he slept - as Eve was created.
- Think of Jacob dreaming of the ladder.

Joshua 23:3 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 fought for you.

God had defeated their enemies. None could withstand Him. Similarly for us, Jesus has, on the Cross at Calvary, defeated every foe. Satan, sin, and death have all been overcome by Him. He "fought" them for you. He came as God in human flesh and took your place on the Cross in a fierce spiritual battle against them. Then He rose from the dead to declare His eternal victory.

It bolsters your courage to know you stand in Christ. (*The Bear...*)

Joshua 23:4 See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward.

The Israelites had received their inheritances in the land. In our case, we are promised all spiritual blessing and every necessary spiritual resource as we walk with the Lord in the world.

Need grace? It's yours in abundance. Need mercies? They are new every morning. Need forgiveness? Simply agree with God and He is faithful and just to forgive you your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

Joshua 23:5 And the Lord your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

Enemies remained for the Israelites to defeat. It is ever so with the people of God as long as we are on the earth. But greater is He that is in us than the enemy in the world. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit. As we yield to

Him and His promptings we act with boldness - certainly an aspect of spiritual courage.

Joshua 23:6 Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left,

The Israelites had the Book of the Law of Moses to guide them through a treacherous world. We have what they had and so much more in the completed Word of God. Truth is an unshakeable foundation for courage to stand upon.

Joshua 23:7 and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them,

Joshua 23:8 but you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day.

The Israelites had enjoyed a season of victory over the world. They had defeated their enemies and could defeat the remainder of them from a posture of strength.

It reminds me of those of us who received the Lord later in life after living in the world and being of the world. God saved you and gave you dramatic early victories. You enjoyed a season of rest and went about defeating enemies both within and without.

Why return to your former ways of life? Sadly, you might feel like you have the freedom to revisit certain old habits or hobbies. You might; but you might also find they are snares and traps. Leave and continue to leave the world behind.

Joshua 23:9 For the Lord has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day.

Joshua 23:10 One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.

These verses could be written over many of our lives as our own testimony. Lifelong addictions were broken when you came to the Cross. Hearts were changed; marriages saved; families reunited. If your spiritual battles were dramatized it would be you and the Lord chasing a thousand sins or habits or demons in the power of His resurrection.

God commands courage. Three times in the first chapter of the Book of Joshua the Lord commanded Joshua to “be strong and of good courage.” He can command you to have courage because of all the ways He encourages you everyday that muster your courage. Don’t let the world overcome you with fear. Be courageous to leave and go on leaving the world as you journey homeward.

#2 It Takes Carefulness
For You To Cleave To The Lord
(v11-16)

Joshua gets a little mushy - but in a manly way. He tells them to “love” the Lord.

Joshua 23:11 Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the Lord your God.

Then Joshua expands upon the marriage metaphor:

Joshua 23:12 Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations - these that remain among you - and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you,

They can “cleave” to the Lord or they can “cling” to the people around them by intermarrying with them. The trouble with intermarrying was that they were already married to the Lord! Returning to any of the practices of the world would be like committing adultery.

I don’t know about you, but when I think about my disobedience or indifference to the Lord as if I were committing spiritual adultery it has a much more sobering impact. James thought so and that’s why he wrote,

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

James 4:5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

God is jealous over you in the best possible way. He loves you and knows that His love is pure and undefiled. He knows His love is what you desire

in your heart of hearts and what you need to fully satisfy you. So when God sees you going after something in the world that He has died to deliver you from, He says it is adultery to make you understand its severity.

Should the Israelites “cling” to the nations around them they could expect the consequences of verse thirteen.

Joshua 23:13 know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the Lord your God has given you.

God would simply stand back for a time and let them have what they wanted. Why would He continue to drive out enemies they embraced?

The world is a place of “snares and traps,” of “scourges” and “thorns.” If you’ve ever backslidden, you know that to be true.

Joshua drives home his point:

Joshua 23:14 "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed.

Joshua 23:15 Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the Lord your God promised you, so the Lord will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the Lord your God has given you.

Joshua 23:16 When you have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you."

- “You know in your hearts” that God loves you and has begun a good work in you and will complete it.
- “You know... in all your souls” that He will never leave you or forsake you and that all things are working together for the good.
- “You know... not one word” of His to you can ever fail.

If you were saved later in life, you know what the world is like. If you have been a believer all your life, you can see what the world is like; you don't have to experience it for yourself.

Returning to or turning to the world will defeat and destroy you. God is jealous over you to protect you.

"Take careful heed to yourselves," Joshua said (v11). Your love for God needs constant care. His love never wavers; but yours can.

Jesus told the church at Ephesus they had left their first love. Outwardly they had it all together. They were doing everything right and nothing wrong. Except that their hearts had grown cold in their affections for the Lord. What they were doing was not with the Lord; it was only for the Lord.

Are you careful everyday to cleave to the Lord? One way is to identify the "traps" and "snares" set for you in the world that will become "scourges in your sides" and "thorns in your eyes"

This word for "scourges" can mean *goad*. A goad was an implement that you used to drive a dumb ox one way or the other. There are lots of goads out in your world - implements that seek to drive you away from the Lord.

"Thorns in your eyes" is even more descriptive. Think of images you see that are ungodly or ideas you entertain that are unbiblical. Then think of them as if they were thorns that immediately pierce your spiritual eyes, blinding you.

The word translated "careful" in verse eleven can be rendered *take good heed*. Those three words mean *speedily and diligently hedge about*.

We sometimes talk, as Christians, in terms of building a 'hedge' around our lives. It's an image from the vineyard where the farmer would always plant a thick hedge of thorns around their grapevines to keep out vermin. Even a small opening in the hedge allowed the critters to come in and spoil the fruit.

Back in the 1980's there was a gritty cop show, *Hill Street Blues*. Every episode Sgt. Phil Esterhaus would close his morning briefing by telling the officers on his shift, "Let's be careful out there."

Cleaving to the Lord requires carefulness. We need to be careful "out there," in the world.

We might add to Sgt. Phil's advice and say, "Let's be careful and courageous out there."

God is jealous over you. Have the courage to leave the world and go on leaving it. Be careful to cleave to Him.