

Joshua 23 and 24 — Last Counsels, God's Faithfulness, and Proving Yourself Clear

Ministry · January 2, 2011

Joshua 23 — God's Faithfulness: The Title of the Chapter

Joshua 23 is God's faithfulness. Joshua 24 is Israel's responsibility and their failure. That the faithfulness comes first is not accidental. We are in ruin — part of it, not exempt from it. We know our own history and what has happened to those gathered to the Lord's name. And yet, like the remnant that returned in Ezra and Nehemiah, the gathering itself is a testimony in two ways: to His faithfulness in gathering, and to the ruin of the assembly. The more we feel that, the better off we are. It will keep us from the pride that said, in an earlier generation, the sun never sets on an exclusive assembly. Where is that assembly today? Broken up. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all might come to repentance — and He is long-suffering while the testimony continues.

Joshua's message in chapter 23 is one an old man gives. It is not so much communicating new truth as communicating the enjoyment of truth already known and proved. Verse 3: you have seen all that the Lord your God hath done to all these nations because of you. For the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you. We are vessels — that is all. God's mailmen. We deliver the message and leave the result with the one who sends the mail.

His faithfulness works in two directions, which is the honest character of all good ministry: he encourages at the beginning of the chapter and warns at the close. Verse 15: as all the good things have come upon you which the Lord your God

promised you, so shall the Lord bring upon you all the evil things, until He hath destroyed you from off this good land. He is faithful in both directions — in His goodness and in His judgment. Not one thing has failed of all the good words; not one thing will fail of the warnings either.

Joshua 18:3 shows the other side of the book: there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes which had not yet received their inheritance. And Joshua said, how long are ye slack to go up to possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers hath given you? An incomplete victory. Much land possessed; much land still unpossessed. The book of Judges is worse — it is a book of losing what had been possessed. How much of the word of God is still unpossessed territory? The rising generation — commit to faithful men, Paul wrote to Timothy, who shall be able to teach others also. Scripture succession, not apostolic succession. The word of the Lord abides forever. The vessels through whom it came are gone; the word remains.

Joshua 24 — Idols They Never Burned

Chapter 24 recounts history from Abraham to Canaan. God brought Abraham from beyond the river where his fathers served other gods. God brought Jacob and his children out of Egypt. God drove out the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Jebusites. God gave them a land for which they did not labour and cities which they built not. And then: now therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your father served on the other side of the river, and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord.

The people answered that they would serve the Lord. And Joshua said: ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God, a jealous God. He knew they had not put their idols away. They had never burned them, never ground them to powder. When did they finally put them away? In Samuel's day — 1 Samuel 7:3–4: if ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and

the Ashtaroth from among you. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only. From Joshua's time to Samuel's — all those years of saying, we will serve the Lord, while the idols sat in their corners.

*Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God. —
Joshua 24:19*

Joshua's burial at Timnath-serah is described: Timnath-serah means abundant portion. In Judges it is called Timnath-heres — a hill of the sun, speaking of flesh. But by faith Joshua received his inheritance in abundance, in Ephraim the fruitful. A fruitful life, an abundant portion. The coming of the Lord draws near. Every day we should have communion with the Lord. Death is no respecter of persons or age. Paul says, redeem the time, for the days are evil. Buy up the time — it is precious.

2 Corinthians 7 — Approved Yourselves to Be Clear in This Matter

Second Corinthians 7:11 contains a phrase worth dwelling on: in all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter. Purity is like clearness — you hold up the glass of water and see all the way through. No muddiness, no sediment on the bottom, no particles floating on top. Either clear or not. The Corinthians had received Paul's first epistle, had obeyed what it said about the moral evil among them, and had proved themselves clear. They had followed through.

Israel at Shechem signed up for the programme. Everyone agreed. We will serve the Lord. Where do I sign? But they never burned the idols. They never followed through. Proving yourself clear in any matter is not signing the paper — it is doing the thing. The Corinthians did the thing.

1 Chronicles 12 — Thine Are We, David

First Chronicles 12 lists the men who came to David at Ziklag while he was still under pressure from Saul. They were men of Benjamin — Saul's own tribe, his relatives. David went out to meet them and said: if ye come peaceably to me to help me, my heart shall be knit unto you. But if to betray me to mine enemies, seeing there is no wrong in my hands, let the God of our fathers look and rebuke it. Are you clear? That was the question.

Their names were wonderful: Ahiezer means helping brother, Joash means the Lord is a support. Great names, every one of them. But names were not the question. What skills do you have? What gift are you? Those were not the questions either. The question was: whose are you? And the answer came in the power of the Spirit — it did not come from the flesh, because the flesh can do nothing to help the work of the Lord. Verse 18: the Spirit came upon Amasai, chief of the captains, and he said — Thine are we, David, and with thee, thou son of Jesse. Peace, peace be to thee, and peace be to thy helpers, for thy God helpeth thee.

That was the confession. A submission to the person of David. And David received them and made them chiefs of bands. They were not received because they submitted their resumes. They were received because they said: we belong to you. That is the only acceptable answer when the Lord raises the question of whose we are. Lord Jesus, thine are we. We belong to thee. They showed themselves to be pure in the matter — not by signing something, but by the words the Spirit put on their lips and by what those words meant about whose they were.