

God's Sovereign Faithfulness

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Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0:00] And we're now going to turn to our Bible reading for this evening. Paul Brennan, one of our ministers, is continuing our time in the book of Joshua. So do grab your Bible and turn Joshua up. If you don't have a Bible with you, we do have plenty of visitor's Bibles spread around the auditorium. They're red here at the front, the side, the back.

If you're not sure where they are and you wave your hand, one of the welcome team will be delighted to bring one to you, I'm sure. And do turn up Joshua chapter 11. And we're going to be reading at the end of that chapter from verse 16 through to verse 23.

And if you're using a church visitor's Bible, that's on page 187. So Joshua chapter 11, beginning at verse 16.

So Joshua took all that land, the hill country, and all the Negev, and all the land of Gushin, and the Luland, and the Araba, and the hill country of Israel, and its Luland, from Mount Halak, which rises towards Seir, as far as Balgad, in the valley of Lebanon, and the valley of Lebanon, and the valley of Lebanon, and he captured all their kings, and struck them, and put them to death.

Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon.

[1:31] And Joshua came at that time, and cut off the Anakim, from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel.

Joshua devoted them to destruction with their cities. There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the people of Israel. Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain.

So Joshua took the whole land according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel. According to their tribal allotments.

And the land had rest from war. Well, amen. This is the word of the Lord. Well, good, please have Joshua open there in front of you.

Joshua 11, and look at these last few paragraphs. Now, our passage this evening answers a simple question. What does it look like when God is keeping His promises?

[3:04] What does it look like when God is doing what He promised to do? Now, this little bit we read earlier is a summary of a summary. We've been looking at Joshua up in the last few weeks, and all we've been reading in Joshua is a summary of what happened.

It's a summary of the events of the conquest. And here at the end of chapter 11, we've got a summary of that summary. Look at the start at the end of the paragraph. It says that Joshua took all that land, verse 16, and then again at the end, verse 23.

So Joshua took the whole land. And we looked last time in a bit of detail at chapter 10, which records the southern campaign, as Joshua and the army took the southern half of the land of Canaan.

And chapter 11 records the northern campaign. And the outcome of these battles is that Joshua and Israel have conquered all the land.

This is a hugely significant moment. What was promised many centuries before to Abraham is now at last come to pass.

[4:17] The land that was promised has now been conquered. How has that happened? Well, our passage gives us a similar answer to the one that you encounter all through the Scriptures.

It sets alongside each other two realities, which in one sense seem contradictory and at odds with each other. But they are not, because the Scriptures always affirms both of these things.

On the one hand, these victories come through the sovereign hand of the Lord alone. He is the one who has given the land to His people.

He is the one who has fought for His people. Divine sovereignty. But on the other hand, this passage affirms human responsibility.

Notice, we didn't read this earlier, but look at verse 15. Look at what it says there. Just as the Lord had commanded Moses' servants, so Moses commanded Joshua, and Joshua did.

[5:23] He left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses. Look at verse 16. So Joshua took all that land.

Verse 18. Joshua made war for a long time. And again, and again, verse 23. So Joshua took the whole land. Both these realities are present in this passage.

Divine sovereignty. Human responsibility. How does God keep His promises? Well, God is at work, and so are His people.

God is doing the things that only He can do, and His people do what they're commanded to. So we'll see both these things in this passage tonight. And we're going to focus firstly on God's divine sovereignty.

That's our first main point. And then three sub-points which deal with the human responsibility side of things. So here's the big thing that we must see in this passage. And we see here that God is faithful to His Word.

[6:27] God is faithful to His Word. The great and primary reason that the people conquer the land is, of course, that God is faithful to what He's promised. This is the great resounding message through all of the book of Joshua.

Great is thy faithfulness. God is doing just what He said He would do. And again, here in chapter 11, we see that God has done just as He promised.

Notice there verse 23. Yes, Joshua took the whole land according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses. The Lord's Word is fulfilled.

He is always faithful to His Word. And that means that God is powerful to bring about exactly what He said. Again and again, we have seen through Joshua that the conquest has been supernaturally fought.

Things have happened that only God could do from the crossing of the Jordan to the battle at Jericho and flick back just to the end of chapter 10, we see the summary of the southern campaign.

[7:39] Look at the last, well, the penultimate verse, verse 42 of chapter 10. And Joshua captured all these kings and their land at one time because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel.

Israel. It's all the Lord's doing. He is faithful to His Word and He's fought for His people. He's powerful to ensure that what He has said will come to pass.

Now that one truth is greatly reassuring, isn't it? That God is powerful to do what He's promised. not just for Joshua, not just for those first people who read this account, but for all believers at all times through history.

For us today, God is faithful to His Word. You can rely upon what God has said because He never forgets a word that He's uttered. He doesn't get lost in the details.

He doesn't forget. He is steadily and surely fulfilling all His promises for the whole world, for His church and for you. God is doing what He's promised.

[8:51] And the Lord has promised, hasn't He, His presence with His people now in this Gospel age. We fight today by proclaiming the peace terms of the Gospel.

We call people to repent, to believe, don't we? We call them to do that so that they would know forgiveness of sins and the gift of everlasting life. life. Because there's a judgment coming.

Christ is returning and the message that people need to hear more than anything else is the Gospel message. Our task is to proclaim that message. And as we do that, God is with us.

Jesus said to His disciples, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you.

And behold, I am with you to the very end of the age. That is God's great promise to us. I am with you.

[10:02] As you go about proclaiming the Gospel, calling people to repent, He says, I'm with you. It's His work. He is the one who transforms minds and hearts.

We don't do that. He does it. That is how He fights now, transforming people's lives as we proclaim the Gospel. And that is a fundamental reality we must never lose sight of.

God is with His people. He's with you and I as we go about the task He's given us. And that's the big thing that we see in this little section of Joshua.

God is faithfully keeping His promises. But let's look a bit closer. And I want to draw out three things in particular which add some colour to that reality of God's sovereignty.

I want to draw out something of our responsibilities as well. In light of God's sovereignty, what does that mean for us? What does that look like for God's people as we go about our task?

[11:08] So here's the first thing to see. Yes, God is faithful to His Word and He's faithful to His Word no matter the passing of time for His persevering people.

God is faithful no matter the passing of time for His persevering people. We see here the faithfulness of God through His people's diligence and patient obedience.

Joshua worked hard. He was diligent. He persevered over the long term. Notice again verse 15 where we see something of Joshua's diligent obedience.

This is a great verse. It's worth just pondering. Look with me again. Just as the Lord had commanded Moses, his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua and so Joshua did.

He left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses. Now you could easily skip over that verse but it's a wonderful verse.

[12:18] What a sentence to say about someone's life that they obeyed the Lord that they left nothing undone. Joshua did just what the Lord instructed him to do.

He obeyed God. That is just about the best thing you could say about someone. when our funeral arrives which it surely will wouldn't that be a wonderful thing that people said about you on that day? He obeyed the Lord. It ought to be the goal of our lives. It ought to be the prayer that we have for our children for one another.

But is it? Is it I wonder? Is it is our great desire for ourselves and our families that we obey the Lord that we be in this regard like Joshua?

Sure Joshua made mistakes he wasn't perfect think about the battle of Ai and think about the whole Gibeonite deception but what Christian what Christian leader does make mistakes?

[13:32] but he didn't wallow in his errors he faced them head on he got on with the task at hand what the Lord commanded Joshua did and I wonder if one of the reasons why we perhaps don't appreciate a verse like this as we ought to is just because of the cultural air that we breathe what does our culture say about authority and obedience nothing good the general view presented to us in the movies that we watch the TV shows that we enjoy the music we listen to the message is this external authority is bad it's mistaken and that true freedom is found in throwing off the limits placed upon you and finding your own way that's the cultural air we breathe isn't it?

now I'm just going to get on a hobby horse for a minute but this is the theology of Disney now if you're my age or maybe even a bit older than I am and you would have been brought up watching Disney and just think about some of those movies Moana not a personal favourite or Ratatouille but just think about the themes running through those movies they are all about youngsters pushing against the authority figures and disobeying following their own hearts when do you ever see a father figure presented in the media as someone who rightly exercises authority who expects obedience from his children and receives it when do you ever see that in a movie unless it's to ridicule the father when is a child ever held up as virtuous because they obey their parents I can't imagine Disney making a movie like that can you and friends we need to be alert to that that is what I was brought up on the greatest hope for our children is that they grow up to love and obey

their heavenly father that is what Joshua is commended for here isn't it look again at verse 15 so Moses commanded Joshua and so Joshua did he left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses your children will struggle to do that if they don't learn obedience from their earliest days parents your children are to obey you you are to exercise authority over them and that means you tell them to do something and you expect obedience entering into negotiations with little Johnny about when will be a good time to leave in order to get to church on time is not going to do them any favours in every home there will be someone in charge either the children or you the parents make sure it's the latter teach them obedience now because you want them to grow to be a Joshua someone who leaves nothing undone of all the Lord commands that is our prayer not just for ourselves but for our children Joshua obeyed and was diligent but he wasn't unique was he we see this in the New Testament as well Jesus in John chapter 8 says that he knows the father and that I keep his word and obedience of the father was not just the mark of Jesus but of all his followers what is it that Jesus commends his people to be about in this gospel age I've read it already the great commission it tells that a key aspect about making disciples is teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded we're to teach obedience so God's divine sovereignty is writ large over this chapter but alongside that reality is human responsibility our responsibility to carefully observe all that's been commanded us and it's not just a one off thing it's a long obedience in the same direction look at verses 16 and 17 you get brief details here about the extent of the lands conquered by Joshua we read at the end of verse 17 that he captured all their kings and struck them and put them to death and then verse 18 it says that Joshua made war for a long time with all those kings and that's a little interesting aside isn't it from the writer it can be easy to forget that the

[18:41] Bible is highly selective in what it records you can read over these opening 11 chapters of Joshua in less than an hour it doesn't take very long but in reality the events covered here took about seven years we know that because in a couple of chapters time we're given some details about Caleb's age at various points through this bit of history and we can work out that roughly these first 11-12 chapters of Joshua took seven years to unravel think about world war two roughly a similar period of time and yet consider how much has been written about world war two we couldn't read all the books written about world war two if you had the time and so for a similar period of time all that we have is 11 brief chapters in Joshua verses 1 chapters 1 to 11 a brief summary but it took a long time and so the fact that God is faithful the fact that God is at work to bring about this great victory that does not mean that progress is always rapid and spectacular it didn't happen in a flash of an eye you know not every battle was a

Jericho not every river crossing was a Jordan type event yes God does sometimes work in the spectacular the amazing but no less so does he work in the mundane the weekly the yearly slog Joshua and all his people his army they had to exercise great patience endurance diligence in the conquest over many years and it's the same for God's people now isn't it in light of God's faithfulness to his word we are to press on to persevere to endure because we know that in the end all that God has promised will come to pass we know that he's with us as we go about our task of proclaiming the gospel not one word that he's uttered will fall to the ground so let's be ready for patient endurance for the weekly slog of ministry not wanting to sound downbeat but that's the reality isn't it effort over time there's no shortcut when you're ten weeks into a release the word term or in the midst of growth groups or you're in the depths of my least favourite month

January it's a bit of a slog isn't it dragging yourself out to go again when you're trying to corral the junior church class of ten three year old boys you need to have your horizon firmly fixed on the long distance don't you you've got to have two decades down the line in your mind when there'll be 23 year old men beginning families and careers taking a responsibility in the life of the church when their voices will be heard in the prayer meeting that's your long term objective isn't it those little three year old lads where will they be in 20 years long term patient endurance is required we work hard we work diligently we do so because God is sovereign how does the apostle Paul reflect on his own ministry he says this I worked harder than any of them though it was not I but the grace of God that is with me divine sovereignty but alongside it human responsibility the grace of God was

with

Paul and that meant he worked his socks off just like Joshua did well let's look on that's the first aspect of it patient endurance careful obedience second thing to see God is faithful to his word no matter the stubbornness of his enemies we read there at the end of verse 19 that Joshua took all the kings in battle and in the very next verse look at verse 20 it's as if the writer was pulling back the curtain on these events he's pulling back the curtain on the scene world and he shows us what's really going on he gives us the reason for these victories he shows us how mighty and how sovereign God really is and if it shocks us it really means that we've not grasped the majesty and the power and the sovereignty of God we haven't really grasped our finitude our creatureliness we haven't grasped our sinfulness verse 20 shows why it was that all these kings took their people into battle against

Joshua and his army even though they had heard about all the Lord had done for his people they had heard about the exodus events the crossing of the Jordan the defeating of Jericho even though they heard all that they still went into battle now on the surface their actions might seem foolish why did they go into battle against Joshua well the ultimate reason for it was that the Lord hardened their hearts look again at verse 20 for as the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel and battle it was the hardening of their hearts that led them into battle against Joshua and to their deaths their going into battle was second half verse 20 in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy God was in total control he would do just as he said he was going to give the land he promised to his chosen people no matter how obstinate how rebellious the people in the land were now perhaps you find this shocking perhaps you get a bit squeamish about it but two things to say one this was a sinful and unrepentant people centuries before when

[25:02] God had promised to Abraham this land he said that his people would not inherit the land until those 400 years of slavery had elapsed in Egypt because he said the iniquities of the Amorites that's the people living in this land the iniquities of the Amorites is not yet complete see this was a sinful people God gave them over to their sin just as with Pharaoh God hardens his heart and Pharaoh hardens his own heart both things are happening at the same time the two go together and so too here theirs was a destiny they walked into they chose they got what they wanted so this was a sinful unrepentant people secondly God is sovereign and holy and we are not the astonishing and shocking truth is not that these people were destroyed but rather not everyone was destroyed there was nothing inherently virtuous about

Israel and Joshua and his people they were deserving as all of us are of God's judgments! But the fact that God is merciful to some that's the shocking thing isn't it?

That some might be saved God is God and we are finite creatures if we perhaps think this is a quirk of the book of Joshua then the New Testament speaks no differently God is absolutely sovereign he is sovereign in salvation and he will honor our choices in Romans 1 we read of God giving men up to the lust of their hearts the hardening of our own hearts through persistent sin goes hand in hand with God's hardening of our hearts and if this challenges how we think of God then we perhaps need to rethink have we domesticated God have we tried to bring him down to our level it truly is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God but he's a merciful God isn't he remember that some of the inhabitants!

of this wicked nation were not destroyed remember Rahab chapter 2 remember Gibeon they heard about the God of Israel they knew he was someone to be feared and so they threw themselves upon his mercy God is faithful to his word and he is sovereign he will deliver on his promises no matter the stubbornness of his enemies no matter how we might feel about that and that is a good thing the writer is not apologetic about it!

confidence and certainly for his people for you and I we don't have a weak impotent powerless God quite the opposite he's able to do just as he promised no matter the the stubbornness of his enemies here's the last thing to say last point God is faithful to his word no matter the fearsome opponents of his faint hearted people look at the end last couple of verses there verses 21 and 22 they're quite striking verses actually it's striking that in this summary of summaries we have one particular people group mentioned why is that why does the writer mention the anarchy you see it

there verse 21 again verse 22 the anarchy perhaps in your line of work you have to read reports if you're sensible you'll read the executive summary and maybe stop there unless something catches your eye something of interest if something is in the executive summary and it's been singled out it means you probably ought to pay attention to it and likewise here the fact that the anarchy are mentioned that should cause us to ask why why in this summary of summaries is one particular group mentioned who were they well you rewind 40 years and we discover that they were the most feared inhabitants of the promised land the anarchy when the spies reported back to

[29:47] Moses they mentioned the men of Anak these men here the anarchy they must have been quite the sight to strike fear into the hearts of Moses and his people these were mountains of men it's a bit like seeing I guess rugby players in the wild has that ever happened to you you've ever bumped into a rugby player remember a friend at university he was in the gym one day and in walked the South African rugby team and he was like you've never seen anything like it like the sun was eclipsed like these absolute huge guys come in and I think if I was to go to tackle with them there's like a 90% chance I would die upon you know contact huge men I wonder if the men of Anak were like that mountains of men in Deuteronomy!

we hear the reasons given for the people's refusal to enter the land those 40 years ago it said this the people are greater and taller than we the cities are great and fortified to heaven and besides we've seen the sons of Anakim there these men struck fear into the hearts of God's people and so aren't these verses extraordinary?

they're a great testimony aren't they? to God's faithfulness despite his people's faint heartedness here were the people that once turned the courage of Israel to jelly here were the people that once seemed an unsurmountable foe but look what's happened they've been cut off from the lands the people that once struck fear and terror into the hearts of Israel no longer an issue they're gone and surely the lesson the writer wants us to learn here is that God is more than a match for even the most fearful of our enemies in fact our greatest enemies have already been defeated haven't they? comprehensively dealt with no longer an issue Christ through his resurrection defeated death and Satan and if those great and fearsome enemies have been dealt with well how much more the things that we fear today the small things in our lives that strike fear into our hearts they're no match for the Lord he is a God who is faithful to keep his promise no matter how much we might fear something no matter the opponents we're scared of the Lord is able to deal with them so yes we are often aren't we a faint hearted people we're fearful we're often cowed by God's stubborn enemies we often grow tired in the long slog of spiritual battle but our God is faithful you and I can trust him to do exactly what he promises to do he will one day be seen by all to have defeated all our enemies he will bring us to that promised heavenly rest he will never leave or forsake his people he will never leave or forsake you or I you can trust him because he's God he keeps his word that's what we see here he's kept his promises and in light of that we work hard let me pray

Father how glad we are that progress in the spiritual life progress in proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth does not ultimately rest on our shoulders because it's you who are faithful it is you who keep your promises it is you that transforms lives and hearts and minds it's you who is building your church and so help us to remember that help us to remember that you are faithful that you are able to do all that you promised and so please would you help us to trust you in light of that help us to trust you and help us to do all that you commanded us to do how we need your help because we so often live by sight and not by faith but help us again to have our eyes lifted to your great promises and so would we be a people that do live by faith help us for we ask in Jesus name

[34:34] Amen who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people who have a people!

who have a people