

Living Faithfully In An Unfaithful World

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we turn now to our reading for this evening, which you'll find in Joshua. And it's Joshua chapter 23. It's our pronouncement week in the book.

And this is the second of the great gatherings under Joshua. Last week in chapter 21, sorry, 22, we had the first of those gatherings as Joshua summoned the eastern tribes that were being sent back east over the Jordan.

And then in chapter 23, it's the second gathering, this time of all the peoples, all the leaders of the land. So we'll read chapter 23 together. I think it's page 197 in the church Bibles.

Joshua 23, verse 1. A long time afterward, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, I'm now old and well advanced in years.

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.

[1 : 2 7] Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the great sea in the west.

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 to you.

Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you, or make mention of the names of their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them.

But you shall cling to the Lord your God, just as you have done to this day. For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations.

And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.

[2 : 4 5] Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God. For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you, and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground the Lord your God has given you.

And now, I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you.

All have come to pass for you. Not one of them has failed. But just as all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the Lord your God has given you, if you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you.

Amen. Well, this is the word of the Lord. Good. Well, please do turn up the passage we read earlier, Joshua chapter 23, and that's page 197 in the Blue Vista Bible.

Joshua chapter 23. Now, do you ever wonder if you're going to make it in the long haul?

[4 : 47] Do you ever wonder if, as a Christian, you're going to make it? You're going to be keeping going one year, five years, ten years down the line. Perhaps you're a student, and you're loving the fellowship of lots of folk your own age.

Maybe it's in the CU, or here at least the word. But perhaps you know the day is coming when you'll have to graduate. It does come, I'm afraid. And you know that you'll maybe have to move on, to move away from Glasgow, from this church.

How will you keep going in the long haul? Maybe you're in the throes of young family life. You can tell I am. Bags under the eyes.

Pregnant pressures in the workplace. Maybe pressures at home. Aging parents are also demanding time. It feels like getting through the week is a major achievement.

Will I really be able to keep going with the Lord ten years, twenty years from now? Perhaps things haven't quite worked out as you hoped. You've not yet found the partner you thought you would find.

[5 : 56] Perhaps you realize the career that you've embarked upon isn't quite delivering all that it promised. You look on the years stretching ahead. Can I really keep things going, I wonder?

Maybe you're retired recently. You spent decades giving your life in a job. You've endured some tough times. Perhaps friends of yours have recently passed away.

You've been through relationship difficulties. You feel the stuffing's been knocked out of you. How am I going to manage? How can I keep going as a Christian?

But maybe you're in the winter of life. You look back on decades of faithful walking with the Lord, the ups and the downs. And you perhaps worry about the future for the church in this land.

What will you pass on to the next generation? What words will you have for younger men and women as you see them Sunday by Sunday? Well, it's faithfulness in the long run that Joshua has at the very forefront of his mind in this chapter.

[7 : 01] This is the second of the great gatherings at the end of the book, at the end of his life. In verse 2, you can see that he is nearing the end of his life.

He's getting old. And he gathers the leaders of the land. He urges them to continue to walk faithfully in the long run. And to keep doing that in the midst of faithless nations.

Yes, the conquest has been successful. Yes, the people have obeyed the Lord. Yes, faithfulness was demonstrated by the people over the few years of the conquest.

But Joshua's concern reaches beyond the immediate horizon. And he's looking into the long term for when he's no longer there. Look again at verse 7.

He's concerned about these nations that they've been driving out. He's concerned that these nations may prove a snare.

[8 : 06] They may pull the Lord's people away from true worship of the living God. And pull them towards a false worship of dead idols. That would lead in the end to a forfeiting of the land.

Again and again, Joshua refers to those nations. 21 times he refers to the nations and to the false gods of those nations in this short speech.

And this was the great and enduring problem for the people of God. As you read on through the Old Testament, again and again, Israel runs after the gods of the nations.

And it does, as you know, lead to exile, to banishment from the land. So what is Joshua's charge to the people?

How does he encourage them to live faithfully in the midst of a faithless world? Three things Joshua underlines for Israel's leaders.

[9 : 07] And three things that stand true for God's people today. If you and I are going to stay the course. If we're going to keep faithful to him. If we're going to enter that promised rest in the end. How do God's people live faithfully in a faithless world?

Well, three things. Firstly, God's people know God's help in the past. And so can be certain of it in the future. Secondly, God's people superglue themselves to God.

And number three, God's people fear the certain judgment of God. So first then, God's people know God's help in the past.

And so can be certain of it for the future. We see here in this chapter yet again in this book of Joshua, the great note of God's enduring faithfulness to his people.

That's been the constant refrain through the whole book. And it should be no surprise then that Joshua here at the end of his life, in one of his closing addresses to his leaders, reminds them again of God's faithfulness.

[10 : 16] And he appeals to them as witnesses of God's faithfulness. Look there at verse three. He says to them, Look on to verse nine.

For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations. It is the Lord, your God, who fights for you just as he promised you. Look on again to verse 14.

You know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord, your God, promised concerning you. All of them have come to pass.

Not one has failed. They were eyewitnesses to the amazing victories God had brought them. Victories against all the odds.

Victories against some fearsome looking enemies. God had done great things for them. God has kept his promises. God has done great things for them. And that, according to Joshua, is the grounds for confidence for the future.

[11 : 51] God would continue to be faithful. Notice the future tense there in verse five. He's just been talking about what God has done. And then verse five.

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. So the key, according to Joshua, for pressing on in the long haul for faithfulness over the long term was a firm foundation in all that the Lord had already done.

Now, yes, some of those nations still needed cleared out. Some of their inheritance were yet to be fully claimed. But just look back on all that God has done.

And with great and overwhelming power, he has destroyed enemy after enemy after enemy. So these ones in front of you, they won't pose a problem. The Lord has already done it.

They had no reason, no grounds whatsoever for doubting God. God, just look at all he's done. He has kept his promises in the past. And he'll keep on keeping them.

[13 : 03] God has kept his word so far. And surely he would continue to do so. Surely his promises were adequate for what lay ahead. And that was and is and always will be the foundation, the basis for the faithfulness of God's people.

God has kept his word so far. As you and I look out in a world that wants to pull you away from the one true faith, as you feel the attraction of the rampant radical individualism that is all around us, that constant call to be yourself, to follow your dreams, to satisfy your desires, what is going to enable you to keep going with all that in the background, constantly in your ear?

Well, you're pointed back to all that God has already done. You are pointed back to what he has done in the past. And his promise keeping didn't end with the conquest in Joshua.

Ultimately, his promises were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the promised son of David. He was the one who came as God's king and judge. And he came with great power.

And on the cross, defeated the great enemy. He fulfilled all the great hopes of the Old Testament. And he will return one day.

[14 : 29] And on that day, he will fully and finally rescue his people. And he will judge his enemies. So you and I, we can look back on far greater victories than Joshua and the leaders of Israel did.

And as we do so, we look back on what God has done in the past. And that gives us, gives you, great confidence, great certainty, absolute certainty for the future.

But we don't just look back on the events recorded in the New Testament. We can look back on events in our own lives where God has demonstrated again and again his faithfulness to us.

And it's not that life is always plain sailing. Absolutely not. But we can look back, even on difficult times. And we can point to God's faithfulness shown to us again and again.

Shown to us in real and solid ways. Those little kindnesses he's shown us. Those little reminders of his faithfulness. Little assurances that he is with us.

[15 : 36] He will never leave nor forsake us. That is the God that we have. He will never leave nor forsake his people. He will never leave nor forsake you.

And that is the thread that runs through Joshua's words here in chapter 23. It is the foundational truth that will keep those leaders going, that will keep you going in the long haul.

God is and will always be faithful to his word and to his people. But not only is God faithful to his people.

There is a flip side to that coin, which is this. God's people are to remain faithful to their God. That's our second point. God's people superglue themselves to God.

It is only in light of that great indicative, the indicative of God's faithfulness, that we come to Joshua's imperative.

[16 : 43] Notice, therefore, in verse 6. He's just been talking about all that God has done. And the great certainty that he can have for the future. Verses 1 to 5.

And then verse 6. Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses. Turning aside neither to the right hand nor to the left.

That you may not mix with these nations remaining among you. But you shall cling to the Lord your God, just as you've done to this day. Look on again to verse 11.

Again, Joshua has just been speaking about God's faithfulness to them again and again. And then verse 11. Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God. For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, you know for certain, that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you.

For they shall be a snare and a trap for you. In light of who God is and all he's done, Joshua implores the people to cling to God, verse 8, and not to cling to the nations, verse 12.

[18 : 02] And that word cling, it means to cling tightly. A process in which things are inseparably joined together. Now the root of the Hebrew word here is the basis for the modern Hebrew word glue.

Glue yourselves to God. Be super glued to him. It's a great image, isn't it? But what does that look like in reality?

What does it mean to cling, to glue yourself to him? Well, two things. It means careful obedience to his word. Joshua is crystal clear, isn't he, there in verse 6.

Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses. Now, not many years before these events here in Joshua 23, all the people heard Moses give three great sermons.

We're in the midst of it on our Sunday mornings in the book of Deuteronomy. And Moses was teaching the people what had been revealed from the Lord, the way of life for the people that the Lord had rescued from Egypt.

[19 : 12] The ten words spoken at Mount Sinai are reiterated and the implications spelled out. Here was the word of the Lord. Here was the way of the life of God's people in the land.

They could be in no doubt about it. They were all there. They heard it. And here, Joshua is urging them to careful obedience of that word.

No turning aside from it. They're not to veer off course from what God had said. Careful obedience to what God had said was going to be absolutely crucial and central if they were to consolidate the conquest and to live in the land.

Careful obedience to his word. But careful obedience also means necessary separation. That is the great purpose of their obedience.

It is to ensure and enable a necessary separation. A separation from the nations they were there to drive out so that they would continue to worship and serve the one true God and to be a witness to the watching world around them.

[20 : 27] Joshua rightly perceives these nations to be a great threat to the people of God and to their long-term future in the promised land.

He keeps talking about the nations and about the gods of those nations because they represented a real threat and they presented a real lure away from the true worship of the living God and towards idolatry.

There was great danger of comfortable compromise with these Gentile nations. Now these nations that Joshua talks about here, these were nations, these were peoples that were marked out for gross sin.

And the conquest that we read about in the first half of Joshua, it records not just a fulfillment of promise for the people of God, but also of judgment on their enemies, on these nations, the Canaanites.

Just listen to how these nations are described in Deuteronomy chapter 18. When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations.

[21 : 47] There shall be not found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens.

Because of these things, the Lord your God is driving them out before you. These were the kind of things that the nations were up to.

Sacrificing their own sons and daughters. Practicing divination. This is why they were subject to the judgment of God. This is why Joshua is just so insistent here in chapter 23 that they separate themselves.

This is what those nations were like. Don't go near them. Separate yourselves from those nations. And these nations were to be destroyed partially as a way of protecting the people of God from their corrupting influence.

If tolerated, if they were allowed to remain in the land, then the idolatries of those nations would inevitably seep into the people of God. The lure of false religion would prove virtually impossible to resist.

[23 : 02] And the ongoing history of the people of God shows that. And the lure of false religion is not something that's consigned to the Old Testament.

We might well have thought we're off the hook, as I read about what they're up to back there in Deuteronomy. But it remains a live issue for the people of God today. False religions, idolatry holds real power today.

And it is firmly addressed in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 speaks of this generation of Israelites as an example, as a warning.

And he urges the New Testament church to flee idolatry, to flee false worship. Perhaps it's the lure of the impressive and spectacular prosperity gospel that you might bump into late nights on TV on one of those channels.

Perhaps more likely, it's the relentless secular gospel that fills the air that we breathe. It's the drip, drip message of the autonomous self.

[24 : 14] The rejection of any sort of objective truth. It's the theology of Disney that tells our youngsters to break free from all they've known and to look within, to find the hero inside themselves to discover their truth, to discover real identity.

All that has great appeal, doesn't it? It's dressed up in the glamour of Hollywood. It's sung by beautiful pop stars. It lures us away from the one true God.

It lures us away from worship of the one who demands exclusive worship and wholehearted service. But here in Joshua 23, one particular threat is mentioned.

One particular aspect of the dangerous lure of the nations. And it's the danger of the people tying themselves to the nations.

That same word, cling, is used there in verse 12. For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you.

[25 : 25] Earlier in the chapter, Joshua urged the people to superglue themselves to God. Well, here he's urging them not to superglue themselves to the nations.

The two things are exclusive. You can't be glued to God and also glued to the nations. He urges them not to be glued to the nations. And the key example that he uses here is marriage.

Look down at the second half of verse 12. He warns them about making marriages with the nations. Don't allow your children to marry the children of the nations.

Because they will in the end prove a snare, a trap, verse 13. It was the very issue that Nehemiah centuries later had to deal with in chapter 13 of that book.

It's the same issue that Paul addresses in 2 Corinthians 6. Where he warns against the Christians there of being unequally yoked with non-believers. So one key implication of the people of God superglueing themselves to God.

[26 : 32] Is that they separate themselves from unbelievers. And particularly so in the area of marriage. So I'll say this very simply and straightforwardly.

If you are a Christian here this evening. And you're not married. Do not for a second contemplate marrying a non-Christian. Do not for a second consider marrying an unbeliever.

And an implication of that is don't date non-believers. Now of course there are lots of different situations that folk might find themselves in.

Perhaps you got married before you became a Christian. And later on you're converted. But your partner isn't. Well Joshua's not talking about that sort of situation here.

He is talking about those who are presently unmarried. If you're a Christian. If you're not currently married but perhaps one day hope to be. You're to marry a Christian.

[27 : 35] And it may be that your hopes are frustrated. You've not yet met someone. And those longings are not helped by a culture that urges us.

That tells us. That shouts at us. That fulfillment as a human being. Is only found in sexual fulfillment. That's a great pressure isn't it.

And so there will be temptation. Real and strong to go for that drink. With the attractive witty intelligent non-believer. Temptation to pursue a relationship.

To pursue marriage. Well heed the warning of Joshua. Heed the warning. Of how things played out. With the people of God in the long run.

It does not go well. And in the end. They forfeit the land. Their witness to the surrounding nations. Is totally compromised. And we too need.

[28 : 38] The realism. Of this warning. So that we are able. To face the challenges of the day. That we are able to maintain. The integrity and purity of the church.

Because the church is. The witness to the watching world. We are the witness to the gospel. So heed the warning of the apostle Paul.

Who urges us to take care. Lest. We fall. So how are God's people to live faithfully. In a faithless world.

Well firstly. It's that God's people know. God's help in the past. And so can be certain of it in the future. And secondly. God's people are to super glue themselves to God.

And by implication. To not. Super glue themselves to other things. And so lastly. Our third point. How do God's people live faithfully.

[29 : 35] In a faithless world. Well God's people. Fear. The certain judgment of God. It would be lovely. If Joshua finished his sermon.

At verse 14. Wouldn't that make for a great final point. To the sermon. Listen to this. It's not one word. It's not one word. It has failed. It has failed. It has failed. Of all the good things the Lord your God promised. It has failed. It has failed.

It has failed. It has failed. It has failed. It has failed. It has failed. Done. Final hymn. But no. Joshua carries on. And it's a hard word.

God keeps his promises. Yes. But just as he promises blessing for obedience. So he also will fulfill his promised curse for disobedience.

Joshua doesn't hold back from reminding the people that if they are to make it in the long run. If they are to remain in the land. Then they are to remain faithful to God.

[30 : 37] Because there are consequences for disobedience. God wouldn't just turn a blind eye. If the people lived however they liked. If they ignored his word. And that is why.

The way of faith for God's people at all times. And it's not wrong. For that to be a motivation. For faithfulness. Knowing that God will keep his promises.

Both in terms of blessing. And also. In terms of cursing. That is a real. And legitimate motivation for obedience.

For remaining faithful to him. Now hold on you might say. Joshua is just being a bit underhanded here. Isn't he? He's just trying to scare them into being faithful. Well yes.

I guess in a way he is. The Lord your God. Is not a tame God. He is the living God. The creator of heaven and earth.

[31 : 39] His son. Jesus. Jesus is the Christ. He is the Lord. And. The promised judge. He is returning one day. And he will come.

In judgment. And that is. A fearful prospect. Knowing that Jesus is judge. And will one day return. To judge the living and the dead.

That is one good reason. To stay the course now. To stay faithful to him. God has made great promises to his people. Promises of land.

And promises of rest. And they weren't just promises. For Joshua. And the people then. God promises his people today. An eternal rest.

And a new creation. And a new heavens. And a new earth. His promises will not fail. All will come to pass. So will you cling to him?

[32 : 39] Will you trust him? Trust that he will do. Just as he says. Will you super glue yourself to him? Resist the lure.

Of the unfaithful world around you. And will you heed. God's gracious. Warning of judgment. Because he won't in the end. Allow rejection of him.

To be ignored. How do we remain faithful in the long run? Well we do it by hearing. And heeding. Joshua chapter 23.

Let me pray. Let me pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you.

[33 : 45] All have come to pass. Not one of them has failed. Lord, we look out at a world that perplexes us.

Lord, we feel the pressure to walk away from faithful service of you. We feel the pressure for compromise.

We feel the pressure to go the way of the world. And Lord, we do sometimes wonder how we might make it in the long run. But Lord, these words speak tenderly to us.

They reassure us of your great faithfulness, of your great promise keeping, and all that you promised to do for your people.

So help us to heed the warning and to cling to you. There is no safer place to be. So help us, Father. Help us to walk by faith and not by sight.

[34 : 49] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.