

Standing Guard
October 31, 2021
Joshua 23:9-13
Clint Pressley

*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.****10****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.****11****Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God.****12****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,****13****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 that the Lord your God has given you.*

*(Pastor prays)*

Like Moses before him and King David after, Joshua is giving us his final words in three different speeches. This passage before us is right in the middle of one of those speeches. When Jesus gave His final earthly words, they were filled with comfort in confidence, and in scripture it says, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” By contrast, Joshua’s final words are not so comforting. In fact what you have here is a warning and a personal appeal from a man who was concerned that the people of God would slip off into idolatry. Which, in fact, they do just a few pages over in the Book of Judges. Maybe Joshua could feel what so many of us feel as the moral ground is shifting under our feet. But the last thing we need to do is be angry. What we need is *personal* holiness, *congregational* health and Bible saturation.

 I mean even this speech is nothing more than Joshua doing an exposition of the Torah. In verses 9-10, Joshua quotes Deuteronomy 4 about God's promise to drive out the nations. In verse 10 Joshua quotes Leviticus 21 and the promise that God would drive out thousands. In verse 11, Joshua quotes Deuteronomy 4:15 about God's command to guard yourself. Also in verse 11 Joshua quotes Deuteronomy 6 with God's command to love the Lord. In verses 12-13 Joshua quotes Exodus 23 that is a warning about marrying a pagan. And in verse 13 Joshua quotes Exodus 10 with a warning about a trap. All of these are bound together for our benefit to press us on to personal holiness, creating a healthy church that loves God's word. It's what Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 1, “Guard the good deposit that's been entrusted to you.” In this confusing, dark world, let's not lose focus on the call of God and the real joy of the Gospel. It must be guarded and it should be guarded, and I think this passage calls us to do so.

**Guard Our Hearts with Hope**

Let's join Joshua in the middle of his farewell speech in verses 9-10.

**Our faithfulness is guarded by providence**

You see this in the very structure of these two verses as you read it. Let me show it to you.

Start on the outer edge of verse 9a. *For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations.* Now drop down to the end of verse 10. *it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.*

So you see by the very structure of it, on the top and on the bottom, you have Joshua pointing out the good provision of God's grace. He dried up the Jordan, he knocked down the Jericho walls, he made the sun stand still. God paves the way. God wins the victories. God destroys the enemies. We can take this all the way into salvation. God saves us by His grace and sovereignty, and it's good for us to explore the bottomless reaches of God's grace found in Christ. But this blanket of providence and provision is surrounding something.

We've looked at the outside verses, but now look at the two inside phrases. Let's start in verse 9b, *And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day.****10****One man of you puts to flight a thousand,* It's the providence of God that makes faithfulness possible. God has built the platform, set the stage, given us direction and nourishment that we might live our lives faithfully for His glory. We understand God's sovereign hand is involved in all things, including salvation.

We describe it like this: God is the holy creator who created all of us in His image. He gives you dignity. That image of God in you has been disfigured by sin. Sin is a crime against a just and holy God. And because of that, a just God will punish that sin, and the wages of sin is death. It’s not just being far away from God, we deserve death. The promise of the Bible is not only that God is just, but that He is also loving. He loves us to the degree that He gives us His son Jesus, who is fully God and fully man. He lived perfectly like we cannot. And at the cross, here is what happens: Jesus dies on the cross to absorb the judgment, the wrath of God, in our place. And the Gospel is that if you turn from sin and believe in the finished work of Jesus, you will be saved.

Our faithfulness is guarded by God's providence. By God's grace you can defeat sin, resist temptation, overcome devastation, get through profound sadness, hurt, abuse, and divorce. Are you being faithful? Our faithfulness is guarded by providence.

**Our souls are guarded by love**

Verse 11 is short, and I'm not happy with the way the ESV has translated it. Be very careful. Take great care for your soul to love the Lord your God. The word used is *nephesh.* It means soul. It is what distinguished us from the animals at creation. God breathed into Adam's nostrils and he became a *nephesh*, soul. And here Joshua is saying, “guard your soul.” Then he tells us how: Love the Lord your God. How many of you even think much about your soul when it is the primary factor of who we are? Our soul must be guarded from images, sounds, thoughts, environments and bitterness. Verse 11 tells us about loving God. The word “therefore,” prompts us to look back at the grace of God in verse 11. Let's just characterize what loving God actually is.

**Loving God is a response to grace.** It's a reciprocating love. God's love for us is a casual love, a creating life-giving love. 1 John 4:19 says, we love because He first loved us. Truthfully, our love for God is a reflection of how we view our salvation. Jesus says, he who has been forgiven much, loves much. If you understand that God saved you as a Hell-deserving, wretched sinner, then you love God for all His marvelous grace.

**Loving God is medicine to our souls.** That's really the primary thrust a verse 11. When your heart is fully turned to love God and find great joy and great contentment in what He has done for you at the cross of Jesus, then your soul doesn't have room for all the filth the world has to offer. Because you are filled with love for God and love from God. Commitment in Christ is a wonderful defense. Certainly that's what Paul meant, at least in part, when he said in Romans 5:5*,* *and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

**Loving God is an act of obedience.** What has come to be known as The Great Commandment is the very heart of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Matthew 22:36-38 says, *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”****37****And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.****38****This is the great and first commandment.* This leads to loving your neighbor. After the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus went to Peter, who had denied him three times, and asked him, “Do you love me?” Then do something. Loving God guards our souls, motivates our lives, secures our obedience, adorns the Gospel and glorifies God. Loving God is practical evidence that we are even Christian. 1 John 4:20 says, *If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.* Our souls are guarded by loving God. Do you love God? How do you love God? How is it evident? Our faithfulness is guarded by providence. Our souls are guarded by love.

**Our lives are guarded by the truth**

Verses 12 and 13 serve as one long “if/then” statement. IF in verse 12 and THEN in verse 13 - We know for certain that. The IF statement in verse 12, IF you turn back, IF you cling to the remnant of the nations remaining, IF you make marriages with them, IF you associate or become like them, THEN verse 13 says “know that”… Now look at all the stacked up consequences in verse 13. THEN, the Lord will no longer drive out the nations. There will be no more victory. There will be a snare. There will be a trap. There will be a rip for your sides. There will be thorns in your eyes. You will perish from off this good ground that the Lord your God has given you.

This is one of those sobering warnings that reminds us that our God is a consuming fire and is not to be trifled with or mocked or ignored or disobeyed. This is the same message Jesus brought when He spoke to Nicodemus in John 3: 16-18. And it seems to be a good passage to end with: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.****17****For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.****18****Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

Jesus did not come to condemn, because we are condemned already. He came to save and He does that at the cross where we find and receive hope. This morning as we close, I want you to think about a few things: Are you living a faithful life to Christ? Do you love God? Would others say that you are saved? Are you guarding your soul? Are you living without Christ and in condemnation?

Guard your heart with the hope we have in Christ Jesus.

*(Pastor prays)*