

**Hold the Line**
October 24, 2021
Joshua 23:1-8
Clint Pressley

***23*** *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,****2****Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, “I am now old and well advanced in years.****3****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.****4****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.****5****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.****6****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,****8****but you shall cling to the Lord your God just as you have done to this day.*

*(Pastor prays)*

In his 1951 farewell address to Congress, it was General Douglas McArthur who made famous the saying, “Old soldiers never die; they just fade away. " And there seems to be a little of that in what Joshua is saying as we head toward the closing of this book. He is an old man now, and his fighting days are over. His best partner Caleb has taken his mountain, and now Joshua turns to the people of God to give them his last words of wisdom before he goes the way of all the earth. And in these words we find life and hope and peace and a warning. As the people in this story are now living in a foreign land, we ourselves occupy a world and country that is not our home. Even still, we've been called to find a way to live with joy in hostility, hope in darkness and a way to flourish in an increasingly evil day. That's partly why I think this passage gives us a clear way forward, a way to face challenges with strength and to live joyfully amidst an age of ever-deepening darkness. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of sound mind.” So today as we walk through Joshua's speech, let us find ways to take these truths and live them to the glory of God, the adornment of the Gospel and the health of our souls because…

**Following Christ is the Hardest Life You Will Ever Love**

There are four primary ways for a life of joy.

**Count the blessings of God**

Right there in verse 1, the editor tells us that Israel has now been in the land a long time, and in verse 2 Joshua gets all the leaders together, the elders, heads and judges and officers. And in verse 2 he states the obvious: I am old. I‘m not like Caleb who is 80 but acts like he’s 40. Caleb’s got a sports car and is climbing a mountain.

 Joshua says I’m not like that. I’m tired of fighting. And in verse 3, he launches into this wonderful speech by telling the people to look back on all the Lord has done.***3****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.* Joshua is reminding them to remember the blessings of God. Remember that you have seen the crossing of the Jordan, the fall of Jericho, the hailstorm that led to victory, the sun standing still. Remember all that God has done for you; remember that God has fought for you.

Here is a great truth and a wonderful discipline for us to get a hold of, especially when we feel overwhelmed. Start saying out loud, or maybe even writing down, all the tangible ways God has blessed you. God has blessed you with food, clothing, people who care for you, church, work, travel, children, friends, healing, finances, health, protection, provision, second chances, love. If that’s not enough, if you are a Christian you need to write down “substitutionary atonement” and “forgiveness.”

Not only that, I'll push it a little farther. It's good to remember the nature of your religion. Five times in this passage, Joshua reminds the people of the personal nature of their God. He is the Lord your God. He loved you and led you and saved you. He has unconditionally placed his affection on you. If God is with us who can be against us? So whether or not you feel loved by others, you know you are loved by God. The nature of God saving us is personal.

A few weeks ago when Kyler Smith preached, there was something that he emphasized that has stayed with me: God loved and saved the worst version of who you are. That's a mountain of grace. Amazing and saving grace. That's the kind of grace that God gives at the cross of Christ and it makes following Christ the hardest life you will ever love. Count the blessings of God.

Here's a second thing about a life with joy.

**Consume God's Word**

Join me there in verse 6, and when you read it, look at all the descriptions of what we are to do with God's word.***6****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,* Keep. Do. Don't turn aside. Here we are reminded that the standard for a life and obedience and direction is God's Word. To love, know, study, memorize, meditate and then live it out. God's Word is to be taught in the pulpit, read in the home and lived in public. Every action and reaction is to be grounded, guided, and ruled by the Word of God. The distinguishing mark of the people going into the land would be a book which is a self-revelation of God.

Learning the Bible and living for God go hand in hand. Why would you claim to love God and not actually know Him as His word has revealed Him? The half-brother of Jesus, James, said in James 1:22, *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

The whole purpose behind becoming familiar with the Bible is to know God and how to best live for Him. The Bible reveals who this God is, that He is the holy creator. He is a holy and just and wonderful and omnipotent creator. The Bible tells us who humans are. It tells us that we were made in the image of God and we, therefore, have dignity. But that image has been disfigured by sin. Sin is an affront to God, and therefore we are under condemnation of a just God who will punish sin. God is holy and He is just, but He is also a loving God. God loves us to the degree that He gives us Jesus. Jesus, who is fully God and fully man, lived perfectly in a way that we would never be able to. Then at the cross the great exchange happens. At the cross Jesus did not die a martyr. Jesus dies on the cross as a substitute, taking the wrath of God in the place of sinners. God raises Him from the dead in victory. And the promise of the Gospel is that anyone who will turn from their sin and put their faith in Jesus will be saved.

God calls on us to think on these things. It’s good to be thankful. It’s good to consume God’s Word. What do you do with God’s Word? You need to build into your life the discipline of daily time in the Word. Maybe set a goal to read the Bible through this year. Work on passage memorization or maybe, if you're good at that, move to a chapter or even a book. Bring your Bible with you to church so during the sermon you can interact with the Bible or do a Bible study. You can pray the Psalms or pray a proverb a day. Find ways to live out the Gospel. Because following Christ is the hardest life you'll ever love. Count the blessings of God and consume God's Word. There's another way to live a life with joy.

**Constantly fight worldliness**

That seems to be the warning that Joshua is giving in verse 7. Let's just read verse 7 and listen to the five things he mentions. ***7****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,*

Do not mix with other nations. Do not mention their gods. Do not swear by them. Do not serve them. Do not bow down to them. Do you see the gradual progression that Joshua is worried about? It starts with mixing and then moved to being conversant with them and then depending on them. It finally ends in full on apostasy with actually bowing down to their gods. And that's actually what ends up happening to Israel. And I'm afraid it also happens to so-called Christian people, families and churches. Here is the danger of an entity called “soft evangelism”, “or “positive doctrine”. There must be a putting on but also a putting off. There must be affirmations and denials. There must be a saying “no” to sin and “yes” to God. What Joshua is warning about in verse 7 is imperceptivity, a gradual slide into apostasy. Here is the gentle backsliding of otherwise godly people and churches. This is the warning. This is the prayer of Jesus for us in John 17: 15-17*.* ***15****I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.****16****They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.****17****Sanctify the in the truth; your word is truth.*

This is the old metaphor of the frog in the kettle. The premise is if you drop a frog into scalding water, it will immediately jump out. But if you place a frog in comfortable, warm water, it will relax and stay there. As you slowly turn the water to a boil, finally it will be cooked before it even is aware.

The metaphor may or may not be true, but the point stands. I think the modern Christian Church in many ways could be the frog in the kettle as a Christian in this society. Last week, Rachel Levine was sworn in as the first transsexual 4-star officer in any military service. And it hit the news and most of society and many Christians yawned at that. What was once beyond our imagination is now reality.

On a personal level, what is embarrassing to us now? What do we do with Sundays? What do we bring into our homes? What do we permit ourselves to be and do? There is a sudden shift in the evangelical culture. It is that it is really cool to mock what is now called the “purity culture.” The idea that sex should be held in the confines of marriage is being mocked. Even with evangelicalism, there is this changing understanding of gender roles, biblical masculinity or femininity. There is a loosening of the exclusivity of the Gospel.

So what do we do with this as believers? Well we have to be diligent and gracious. We have to strive to be holy and follow the biblical model. We have to be willing to join Christ outside of the camp. Do you know the first verse of Psalm 1? “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of scoffers.” The reverse is also true. Cursed is the man who walks in the council of the wicked, stands in the way of sinners and sits in the seat of scoffers.

God has called us His people to be a set-aside people. Isn't that what Peter meant in 1 Peter 2:9 when he said:*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* And today I'm asking you to count the blessings of God, consume the word and constantly fight worldliness.

**Cling to the Lord your God**

That’s verbatim from Joshua 23:8. It is a total surrendering, yielding, trusting, turning to, seeking and believing in and being content in Christ. In short, this it what it means to actually be a Christian. Following Christ is the hardest life you will ever love. I would like to close with some questions.

**Off the top of your head, can you count 10 ways God has blessed you?**

**Is your salvation the top one?**

**How would you characterize your own Bible intake?**

**In what ways has worldliness crept in?**

**How do you need to start fighting worldliness?**

**Do you cling to God through the grace of the Gospel ?**

**Are you counting on the work of Christ?**

Following Christ is the hardest life you will ever love.

*(Pastor prays)*