



Another Farewell Message Begun

Lesson Aim: To note Joshua's final counsel and the positions in which he left the tribes

L5. Date: May 1959. **Text:** Joshua 23:1-5, 11-14.

Topic: God: Faithfulness of.

It is with regret that we observe the work of a loyal man of God come to an end. Our study today is concerning the last address Joshua made to Israel before his death. He had served faithfully under Moses during those forty years in the wilderness. He had led the people in the conquest of Palestine. The hill country of Palestine is now conquered but there are still many individual cities in the valleys and coastal plain which were held by the old inhabitants of the land. Joshua assigns to each tribe the territory it was to possess and leaves it to each individual tribe to take the cities in its borders which were still unconquered. His address, as recorded in chapter twenty-three, is intended to point out God's former work on their behalf and to encourage their continued faithfulness. The discussion here will include the entire chapter. Take your Bible and read it carefully.

There is one point of truth basic to this lesson: God is working out His purposes among men. It was these purposes which motivated creation, caused the call of Abram and selection of Israel, gave the revelation of the Scriptures, sent Jesus as the Saviour of the world, and these purposes shall find their fulfillment in the end of this age. We are a part of these purposes. As God's will is done in our lives we are contributing to their accomplishment as much as was Joshua or Israel. The realization of this fact gives a new sacredness to life. As a part of the church we are a part of the kingdom work which He has entrusted to the church. May God help us to fill our place.

EXPOSITION

I. God Can Be Seen at Work in Human History, 23:1-3.

1. He causes nations to rise and fall, verses 1-3. Joshua is now an old man, having reached the age of 100 years, (Joshua 24:29). The conquest of the land had taken place thirteen or fourteen years before. Realizing he is about to die, Joshua calls for the leaders of Israel to assemble that he might address them. When they come he is anxious for them to realize that their good fortune in the conquest of the land has been the result of the work of God. Therefore, he does not point out what the nation has done, nor what he has done as their leader, but points to what God has done in driving out the people from before them. Thus he at once abases himself and exalts God. It would have been possible for Israel to feel her victories were due to their veteran general or to their devoted army. Such was not the case. Joshua stresses that their enemies had been defeated, not by his prowess or theirs, but solely because the Lord had fought for them. Therefore, the glory belonged to Him. *“For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favor unto them,”* Psalm 44:3.

2. God is still in control of world events. We may wonder why He allows a sinful nation to exist or to prosper. Though we do not understand, we can be sure He is working out His purpose. Perhaps that nation will show His glory, as did idolatrous Egypt in the days of Moses. We can rest assured, *“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God,”* Psalm 9:17. The plan of God to cause righteousness to prevail over evil and bring glory to His name will not be thwarted. The day will come when the world universe will join in a grand anthem of praise to the God who controls the world. However, no one nation is indispensable to God’s purposes. A nation is allowed to exist only as it fulfills its place in God’s plan. This is true of our own nation. God help us not to fail.

II. God’s Work in History Encourages Our Fullest Obedience, 23:4-11.

1. We should fill our assigned place, verse 4. The challenge left Israel was a serious one. The military strength of the Canaanites had already been broken to the extent that they did not offer a serious threat to the Hebrews. There would be a great temptation to “let well enough alone” and allow the Canaanites who were not already conquered to remain unmolested in the land. To do so would be to disobey God and endanger the nation by religious defilement through their contact with the false religion. There was

too much at stake to run this risk. To be so defiled was to risk being driven out of this land by their enemy, Numbers 33:55-56. For any one tribe to fail would endanger the whole nation. Their security and future blessing was assured only as each man stood in his own place, as each tribe completely occupied their territory. Each tribe held the relation to the nation that each church member holds to the total congregation. For one to fail will cripple the work of the whole.

2. We should depend upon the provision promised of God, verse 5. God is ready to go on and complete the work. In spite of the enemy which remained unconquered in the land and in spite of their soon loss of Joshua as their leader, God was ready to carry them on to victory. Worry is not to hinder Israel's efforts, for God would grant her victory—*"the Lord your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight,"* verse 5. God's promises to us are no less than those to Israel. He has promised us His presence (Matthew 28:20), His Spirit (John 14:16-18), His strength (II Corinthians 12:9-10) and His victory (I Corinthians 15:57). Moreover, His promises are always valid because *"the Lord is not slack concerning his promises,"* II Peter 3:9. Neither are we afraid of God's inability to perform His promises. Instead, we are *"fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform,"* Romans 4:21. Therefore, we have no fear of God's reliability nor of His ability in performing His promises. We are boldly confident that He will fully provide.

3. We should consistently obey God's Word, verse 6. It is not always easy to be faithful to God. Often faithfulness demands exceptional heroism and courage. To be very courageous in obedience is simply to "do your uttermost." This great exertion is to be in the way of perfect obedience to the law. Unless one is strong and does his best he will not keep the precepts of God. He who would seek to be God's servant should be careful to obey all the law. To turn aside to either right or left is to fail in obedience, and this is disobedience. This obedience, though exacting upon the disciple, is not a burden. Truly, man lives only by the words that proceed from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4), and obedience to these words is life abundantly. Someone has truly suggested, "There is no burden to following Jesus if you follow Him close enough." Just so, there is no burden in obedience if one is motivated by a heart full of love and a life fully dedicated. The fact that God is governing the whole world, and that we are a part of His total plan, makes it all the more urgent that we observe and obey that rule of conduct He has set out in the Scriptures.

4. We should never condone false religion, verse 7. The gravest danger of being on too intimate terms with the adherents of false religion is

that one may be influenced to turn into error. This is the danger against which Joshua warned Israel, and their subsequent history only too forcibly justified his forebodings. Human nature has always been the same. Error appears attractive while truth often appears commonplace. The gods of the heathen were not to be remembered and mentioned, but to be destroyed and their names forgotten. A vow was not to be taken in the name of a false god. What a lesson for the modern Christian who thinks, "One church is as good as another. After all, we're all working for the same place." Religious error is one of the worst sorts. For a Christian who holds the truth to bid "God-speed" to a person who holds false doctrines, he becomes a partner in the spread of error. God give Baptists the grace and grit to stand up for the truth and emphasize our differences, not our likenesses, to various cults which are thriving over America. Read carefully Revelation 2:12-17.

5. We should hold on to God with reverence and love, verses 8, 11. To "*cleave unto the Lord*" is to delight in Him, depend upon Him, devote oneself to His glory, and continue to do so unto the end. It is to devote oneself to the service of God and leave it up to God to make provision of all our needs to accomplish that purpose. We can almost feel Joshua is saying, "*Go on and prosper for the Lord is with you while you are with him.*" No foe is too great nor is any task too demanding for him who truly reveres the Lord. Past victories only prepare for the battles that are to come. Therefore, let each one examine himself carefully seeing whether or not he truly loves the Lord. On verse 11, Bush's Notes comments, "Let not the assurance of the divine favor, presence, and protection, tend to relax your diligence or weaken the sense of obligation to love and serve him; on the contrary, let it operate as an individual motive and to the most intense affection and devotedness towards your heavenly benefactor. The presence of corrupt neighbors creates an imperative for greater watchfulness and diligence."

6. We should depend upon God's help, verses 9-10. Again, the fact of past victories is called to mind, "*no man hath been able to stand before you,*" verse 9. Even formidable enemies have been overcome under the power of the Lord. Now what of the future? The future offers new opportunities for the work of God. If the time comes when the enemy far outnumbered the people of God, "*one man of you shall chase a thousand,*" verse 10. These promises are not just to Joshua and Israel. They are for the faithful of God in every generation. God does not change (Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17) and His help is always available. Let the Christian who feels outnumbered and downcast take new courage. God is faithful (I Corinthians 13:10) and God is able (Jeremiah 32:27). We need only give Him an opportunity to work through us and the job is done. Let the Christian

honestly pray, “Lord, I am doing my best. Sanctify my efforts to make them effective; strengthen me where I am weak; make me victorious for the sake of Jesus.” What a difference it will make! God is not way up in heaven—He is here in us and with us. Let us learn to lean heavily upon Him for aid.

III. God’s Work in History Warns Against Sin, 23:12-16.

1. Sin will promote defeat, verses 12-13a. Warning is again given against a union with the pagans of the land. Any alliances, intermarriages, or close communion with them would surely bring regret. To go back with the enemy would be to forsake God and would be double calamity. Israel had formerly had experiences of the defeat which sin brings. They had found themselves shut out of the land of Canaan at Kadesh-barnea because of their unbelief. They had found themselves fleeing before the men of Ai because of sin in the camp. Now the warning is given. It is sin to enter into fellowship with the Canaanites. If Israel persists in forming such bonds, God will forsake her to her fate of having to endure the presence of pagans within her borders and she will suffer much for it. No one is ever really profited by engaging in sin. Sin will bring ultimate defeat, if not in this life it will certainly be defeat in the life to come.

2. Sin will increase suffering, verse 13b. Like continual goads, spurs, or scourges or as an annoying thorn in the eye—thus will the sinner become to the righteous. God warns that the Canaanites will become thus to the Israelites if they fail to fully possess the land. The people of God will be caught in their traps, seduced into crime by their allurements, and thus receive the condemnation due the sinners. In fact, Israel is warned that communion with the pagans will allow them to so gain the ascendancy over them that their respective conditions will be reversed. Instead of the enemy being exterminated, Israel herself will “*perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you.*” Thus we can see that no people are so favored of God that He will overlook or lightly excuse their sins. Who can describe the suffering brought by the continual lash of a whip or the constant pricking of a thorn? Yet, thus shall the Canaanites be if Israel disobeys God and fails to overcome them. Many a Christian is living with a troubled mind because he is not willing to break with sin in his life. The penalty is still the same—sin will increase suffering.

3. Sin will ultimately destroy, verses 15-16. Israel could claim no greater privilege than the nations whom they had disposed in the conquest of Canaan. The latter had been driven out of the country because of their sin. Israel would suffer a similar fate if they were disloyal to the covenant in

virtue of which alone they had taken possession of the Promised Land. This was a “good land” which God had given them. What a national loss if they were now dispossessed themselves because of unfaithfulness. The subsequent history of the chosen people abundantly shows that both the apostasy and the judgment which were forewarned did actually take place. Let every Christian read this and be warned. The worldly, sensual, carnal Christian has no more right to expect indulgence from the justice of God than the disobedient Jew. Peter says God is one “*who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work,*” I Peter 1:17.

4. Sin will invoke God’s anger, verse 16ab. Judgment, forewarned above, will come because sin arouses God’s anger. The anger of the Lord is attributed as the cause of political troubles in Judah, II Kings 24:20. God is jealous in behalf of righteousness and sin stirs up His furious anger which immediately moves to execute vengeance on His adversaries, Nahum 1:2. This anger is not temporary, fleeting, and capricious. God is always angry against sin and sinful man, Psalm 7:11. He who lives in sin invites the manifestation of this Divine anger upon himself. “*Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord,*” Romans 12:19. The sinner must repent or face God’s wrath. Read Revelation 6:12:17.

CONCLUSION—Sin is always most serious when it is against light, verse 14. God has done so much for Israel, and for us, that none of us are to be excused from obedience. With our revelation of God, those who sin against Him are sinning willfully. “*For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries,*” Hebrews 10:26-27. What is your relationship with God?

QUESTIONS

1. Give a brief survey of the life of Joshua.
2. What is the basic truth of this lesson?
3. What is God’s relation to the nations of this world?
4. What should be our attitude toward God’s Word?
5. What should be our attitude toward unscriptural religions?
6. What is the ultimate result of sin?
7. Give three lessons you gained from this study.