

Joshua 23 • Joshua's Discourse on Love

Introduction

The book of Joshua is one of the most positive books in the Bible from a purely human perspective. Whereas much of biblical history documents man's failure to live up to God's expectations and standards, Joshua documents overwhelming spiritual success. In this regard it is probably no coincidence that the book of Joshua begins and ends with the same thing—a reminder of the working of God's Word. Whereas in the first chapter Joshua and the people engage in a process of mutual accountability to God's Word as the foundation for spiritual success and service, at the end of Joshua's life he reminds them that it's this very commitment to God's Word that has been the basis for all their success and the key to seeing it continue to its logical end. But in its final result of molding and shaping the human heart, Joshua reveals that obedience and faithfulness are not ends to themselves, but the agents that produce the greater work of love of God.

¹Now it came about after many days, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies on every side, and Joshua was old, advanced in years, ²that Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders and their heads and their judges and their officers, and said to them, "I am old, advanced in years. ³And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the Lord your God is He who has been fighting for you. ⁴See, I have apportioned to you these nations which remain as an inheritance for your tribes, with all the nations which I have cut off, from the Jordan even to the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun. ⁵The LORD your God, He will thrust them out from before you and drive them from before you; and you will possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you.

⁶"Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, ⁷so that you will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods, or make anyone swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them. ⁸But you are to cling to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day. ⁹For the LORD has driven out great and strong nations from before you; and as for you, no man has stood before you to this day. ¹⁰One of your men puts to flight a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, just as He promised you.

[Read v.1-5]

Q: What indicates the depth of quality of Joshua's spiritual leadership in the way that he begins this discourse?

A: Joshua makes no mention of anything positive about himself but focuses everyone from the outset on their own witness and testimony of God's working in their life by stating, "...you have seen all that the LORD your God has done...".

Q: Why was it such an important issue Joshua raised, that God was fighting for them and driving out the nations from Canaan?

A: This was the "last straw", if you will, of the disobedience of the first generation who refused to enter and take Canaan as promised by God, and thus the proof of His faithfulness by this second generation that had now successfully experienced the fulfillment of His promises.

Q: Some of the land had been taken and possessed by Israel, but much was yet to be taken. Why does Joshua speak as if everything has been completed?

A: Since God **has** fulfilled everything exactly as proscribed to this point, it should be an affirmation of their faith that He **will** complete the work.

Application: Do you see that God's faithfulness to what is now behind you is an assurance that He will take care of everything before you?

[Read v.6-10]

Q: How would you summarize Joshua's call to Israel in v.6?

A: Obedience.

1. "keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses". To be accountable to even the smallest detail of God's Word.
2. "that you may not turn aside from it to the right or to the left". To walk consistently in Him, wholly and exclusively devoted to Him. (This is also called "sanctification".)

Q: How would you summarize the "fruit" or role of obedience in v.7?

A: Faithfulness.

1. "so that you will not associate with these nations". Spiritual obedience leads to an increasing desire for a right relationship with God and no other.
2. "or mention the name of their gods, or make anyone swear by them". Faithfulness is identified by never wandering from the name of the One True God.
3. "or serve them, or bow down to them". The object of one's service

and devotion defines to whom one is faithful. A servant cannot serve two masters.

Q: How do the qualities in v.6 & 7 demonstrate what it means in v.8 “to cling to the LORD”?

A: Obedience and faithfulness are the defining characteristics of clinging to God. Just like the act of clinging, they describe something ongoing, long-term, continual, not a one-time event. You can only embrace and grasp and therefore really “cling” to one thing at a time.

Q: So what is implied in Joshua’s reminder of their past success for the future?

A: The second generation succeeded where the first generation failed by their obedience and faithfulness. Therefore they can trust God to complete the work just as mightily as He has to date if they **CONTINUE** in the quality and fervor of their obedience and faithfulness to Him.

Application: *Why do we sometimes feel like there’s something “extra” to accomplishing God’s will other than maintaining an obedient and faithful walk in Him? Do we ever forget God’s past faithfulness to us when we face oncoming events of the future? How does this fit in with the definition of faith provided in Hebrews 11:1?*

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

[Read v.11-13]

¹¹“So take diligent heed to yourselves to love the LORD your God. ¹²For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, ¹³know with certainty that the Lord your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

Q: What does Joshua state as the ultimate result of obedience and faithfulness in v.11?

A: That it is “to love the LORD your God”.

Point: *Biblical love does not rely on feelings or emotions that are difficult to fully detect and measure, but on the visible evidence of one’s obedience to God’s Word and faithfulness to Him and no other.*

Application: *By this standard, how well would you say that you “love” God? For others that know you—whether very well or just casually—how well could they measure your relationship with God based on your obedience and faithfulness to Him? If there’s anything lacking in our love, how can it be addressed on our part?*

Q: What are the inevitable results of choosing not to “cling to the LORD”, that is to maintain a loving relationship based on obedience and faithfulness?

1. First, God will cease to work on our behalf: “the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you”.
2. Second, we will become spiritually overcome by our choices to be obedient and/or faithful to another: “they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes”.
3. Finally, we will experience defeat: “until you perish”.

Point: *This is not just an ultimate, overall pattern for life in general, but describes how we are defeated in individual areas of our life over points of spiritual struggle. Those things with which we struggle are those things to which our obedience and faithfulness is, in reality, at least partially committed to someone other than Christ. Are there areas of your life that this accurately describes?*

¹⁴“Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed. ¹⁵It shall come about that just as all the good words which the LORD your God spoke to you have come upon you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the threats, until He has destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you. ¹⁶When 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 burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you.”

[Read v.14-16]

Q: How does Joshua see God's will for our life?

A: As already having been successfully completed based on God's faithfulness to do everything exactly as He promised.

Q: What does Joshua provide as the potential factor preventing the successful execution of God's will in our life?

A: Our own personal obedience and faithfulness.

Q: What is the dual-edged aspect of God's Word?

A: It renders life and goodness to those that obey it and death and destruction to those that transgress it. It works in concert with the direction of one's obedience and faithfulness.

Overall Application

- *What does your past teach you about your future? Do you see that all success—past, present, and future—is rooted in the quality of devotion to, or deviation from, obedience and faithfulness to God?*
- *That to which you cling to the most and hardest is the best indicator of that to which you're truly obedient and faithful. Is it consistently and truly Christ or someone/something else? What are the steps provided in this lesson leading to releasing all else from your grasp except Him alone?*
- *How well do you truly understand that God's Word is actually your choice for life or death? Can you see that every revival, spiritual movement, and/or personal spiritual re-awakening has, is, and will be rooted in a recommitment to God's Word? How does this guide you going forward?*