

This is the next to the last message in Joshua. While this is an historical record of Israel's conquest of Canaan and distribution of their tribal lands, we have seen many spiritual analogies relating to our spiritual growth and claiming the spiritual land God has for us. We saw that it was an act of God that brought us into the kingdom in the parting of the Jordan. In the walls of Jericho falling, we saw God fights our battles if we will be obedient. We saw the consequences of compromise. We saw the importance of getting God's input in our decisions in the Gibeonite deception. And in the distribution of the land, we saw how God has appointed our lot in life and His faithfulness to His promises. Our last message in Joshua warned us to be faithful to pass on our faith to the following generations.

In our passage today, Joshua knows his time on earth is almost over and he wants to be sure the nation is faithful to do all that God has commanded. That should be our heart for our children and those whom we disciple. That is my heart for you.

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, 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. Joshua 23:1,2 Joshua knew he would soon pass from this life, and so he called together the leaders of Israel to share with them his concerns. In the next chapter he will address the people and renew the covenant before he dies. It is the leaders, the elders, judges, and officers who will set the tone for the nation. While people often elect someone like themselves, the rare person of integrity can steer a people to become better. That is what Moses had done, and Joshua followed in his mentor's ways. Now that the people have dispersed into their own sections of the country, it will be up to those leaders to continue to lead the people in godly living. This was the concern on Joshua's heart before he passed.

The text begins with the phrase, "a long time afterward." Since Caleb took the land at eighty years of age, if Joshua was about the same age and will pass at 110, this may mean this took place thirty years after the allotting the land to the tribes. Joshua had twenty to thirty years to build, plant, harvest, and enjoy the fruit of his labor and watch the growth of his posterity (Psalm 128:6¹).

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. Joshua 23:3-5 Look what the Lord has done! There is a song by that title. He healed my body; He healed my mind; He saved me just in time. O I'm gonna praise His name. Each day He's just the same. I'm gonna praise Him; Look what the Lord has done.

For the Israelites it was the amazing fulfillment of slavery to freedom and a homeland, victory over the enemies of God, homes and fields and wealth. What an amazing life they had lived. Is it not just as amazing for us? For us it is salvation of our souls, eternal life, separating us from the world, the fruits of the Spirit, the presence of

Christ in us seeing us through the difficulties of life, the leading and comfort of the Holy Spirit, fruit that remains, and the expectation of our home in heaven (Psalm 103:2ⁱⁱ).

But like the Israelites, there is land allotted to us of which we have yet to take possession. While the Spirit gives me love and joy, I often miss out on these because I take my eyes off my Savior and focus on this fallen world (Hebrews 12:2ⁱⁱⁱ). I can take the spiritual land if I will go to war, but I'm comfortable where I am. The LORD will go before me but being entertained and doing what I please are so much easier. Taking time to love others and get to know them and share Christ with them is demanding of my time, and it can be intimidating, even if I know Christ will go before me. To pray for them each day is time consuming. We face the same enjoyment of rest and compromise they faced (Galatians 6:9^{iv}), which is why Joshua spoke the following verses.

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, Joshua 23:6 Don't get soft! Be very strong to keep and to do what the Word commands us (2 Timothy 2:3^v). We are not under the laws of Moses, though the moral laws still apply to us. We have what the Law pointed to, the Messiah, Jesus (Luke 24:44^{vi})! And He gave us a new command. *"Love one another as I have loved you"* (John 15:12^{vii}). *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15^{viii}). *"Let the Word of God dwell in you richly"*(Colossians 3:16^{ix}). *"Present your bodies as living sacrifices...Do not be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind"* (Romans 12:1,2^x). *"Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."*^{iv} There are so many more commands in the New Testament. They are stated in a Greek tense called imperative. In other words, they are the things we must do in the power of the Spirit. When people say it is all by grace, I hope they are talking about salvation, because sanctification certainly requires us to be soldiers of the Lord Jesus and engage in a daily battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil (1 John 2:15-17^{xi}).

Yes, the Lord goes before us and it is by grace that we continue to fight, but it is up to us to get up off our duffs and be obedient as Joshua was exhorting the Israelites to do. Notice he tells them to do ALL. **The Bible is not a cafeteria where you take what you like and leave the rest,** though that is how too many believers treat it (Joshua 1:8^{xii}). God help us! And He will, if we get off our couches of comfort and engage in the battle. Sitting in your easy chair and saying, "It's all by grace," is an excuse to ignore the commands of Jesus our Savior! Christianity has been so soft pedaled and presented as a free ticket to heaven and nothing more. That is a damnable lie. It is enlisting in heaven's army. ²⁴ *"Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.* Luke 13:24 We don't wage war like the world does. We fight on our knees (2 Corinthians 10:4,5^{xiii}). We take a lot of fire directed at us. We persevere and try harder because our Savior has gone before us as an example and His life in us empowers us (Romans 8:11^{xiv}). Our retreats are temporary to be renewed so we can head back into battle against the world's strongholds, the ground the enemy holds in our minds, and against spiritual forces in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12^{xv}). Joshua told them to not turn aside from the Word to the right or the left (Deuteronomy 5:32^{xvi}). In other words, no compromise.

People ask me how to hear from God. We certainly can develop a spiritual ear for the Holy Spirit, and we should endeavor to do so, but we already have our instructions in the Word of God. If you aren't reading and studying and taking to heart the field manual,

it is no wonder you don't know what God wants you to do. Get off the couch, get in your study chair, get some note paper or a diary and start learning what God expects you to do. Yes, He will help you, but don't say, "It's all be grace," while you spend your days doing as you please. A soldier who does as he pleases ends up dead or in the brig. Quit compromising and start training and listening for your orders. Did you notice we are losing the war in the USA? Our heroes are dying, and someone needs to take their place, or we'll all be in further retreat. Time for the church to wake up and take a stand.

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, Joshua 23:7 Here is our problem. Joshua was saying don't mix it up with the heathen so that you start talking about their gods (Psalm 16:4^{xvii}). You know what their gods are. Listen to what the popular people of the world promote. They identify them. The number one god for most people is self. A close second is possessions, followed by fame, and making a name for oneself.

I hesitate to put sports in this mix as many players honor God. But I can say if you know more about the players' names than you do Bible characters, if you know more about their stats than you do Bible references, if you are more excited about game time than you are worshiping God, your priorities are out of whack. Do you think you will talk about any of those things in heaven? Eternity looms before us brothers and sisters.

⁸ but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day. Joshua 23:8 Here is the solution. Cling, cleave, hold tightly to the LORD you God. "*You shall cling to the Lord your God just as you have done to this day.*" This verb is used frequently by Moses in Deuteronomy and by Joshua in 22:8. It is perhaps the strongest adhesive verb in the Old Testament and is used in Genesis 2:24 to describe marriage. The man is to "hold fast to his wife," cling to her, stick fast to her, so that they become "one flesh." The word speaks, then, of total commitment, loyal devotion, and deep personal affection.^{xviii} The world will always tempt us to let go and grab something temporal that promises but never delivers.

Hebrews 2:1 is similar: *¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.* The language is of a boat securely tied to a dock. What they had heard were the laws God delivered to Moses and the testimony of God's holiness and faithfulness. Moses is warning them, and we have the same warning, that there is a temptation to relax our grip, to loosen the knot, to slowly without realizing it start drifting away from our commitment to God.

Those Israelites had been faithful to that point. They had forsaken everything to do God's will and take the land for seven long years of battles. They had seen amazing things as God fought for them, but most of the battles were sword to sword, slugging it out, bloody, hard fought and full of sweat. I don't blame them for wanting to rest instead of finishing the job. But Joshua is about to warn them what will happen if they don't. The warning is for us if we don't fight on and continue to *cling* to Jesus (John 12:26^{xix}).

⁹ 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. Joshua 23:9,10 Joshua is reminding them of what the LORD has done in driving out the nations that were more powerful than the Jews and yet the Jews were like supermen

to them. They were so victorious it would have been a temptation to think they were mighty in their own strength (John 15:5^{xx}).

We sometimes get to thinking that our salvation and progress toward sanctification is all just our effort, forgetting that it was grace that drew us and grace that keeps us. That doesn't mean that we don't make every effort to cooperate (2 Peter 1:5^{xxi}), but rather it recognizes that our efforts would be nothing without the abundance of grace we receive.

The enemy of our soul is much more powerful than we are. We are in similar sandals to these to whom Joshua is speaking. We are victorious in Christ, but don't let it go to your head. The enemy has not overwhelmed you only because Jesus has helped you to stand (Romans 8:31^{xxii}).

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. Joshua 23:11-13

Because it is God who defeated our enemies who were stronger than us, we had better be very careful to love the LORD our God. This implies intentionality and effort (Deuteronomy 6:5^{xxiii}). If we turn away from the LORD and start clinging to these nations and intermarry with the people still in the land and making associations with them (meaning ungodly people), the LORD will no longer fight for us. Just as the word "cling" is a picture of marital commitment to the LORD in verse 8, here it is a deep relationship and commitment to the idol worshiping nations. Those compromises for wealth or lust will only end up becoming a trap. They will be a whip on our side and thorns in our eyes. Then we will be the ones who perish.

The application was probably clear to you as you read it. Compromise with the world, marry the ungodly, go into business with the wicked, adopt the ways of this world and we fall under the curse (Psalm 7:11^{xxiv}; 9:17^{xxv}). God wants us to love and cling to Him alone because He loves us and wants to bless us. But if we backslide and there is no difference between us and the world, why should we receive His blessings? Why not rather give us the judgments the world receives? I keep hearing that in the research polls the difference between the world and the church in many areas of life is negligible. We have failed to heed this warning.

¹⁴ "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. Joshua 23:14 Joshua knows he is about to die. All earth is experiencing the entropy that came with the curse (Romans 8:20,21^{xxvi}). Our bodies are not exempt no matter how godly we are. He considered all the promises of God to Israel fulfilled. There was much yet to be done, but God had kept His side of the promises. The Jews could continue to stand on the Word of God and expect the promises to be fulfilled.

I believe we can say that God has not failed in any of the promises He has given us. There is much yet for us to do as well, and God has promised to help us, and we too can declare His faithfulness. But let us continue to trust in His great and wonderful promises.

Think back on all you have experienced of God's rich mercy and awesome covenantal grace thus far. Think of where you were when God found you, the circumstances of your new birth, the assurance of sins forgiven, your increasing deliverance from the world, the flesh, and the devil, your growth in grace and godliness, the progressive restoration of the image of God in you. They are all testimony to what the Lord our God has done for us in Christ. But they also motivate us to recognize that no faith can be strong if it is not growing, no virtue will be safe if it is not enthusiastic, and none of us will be secure if we are not daily dependent on God's mercy and grace, made ours in the Word and by the Spirit. Joshua's backward look is not an exercise in nostalgic self-indulgence. His theme song is not "I believe in yesterday." His call is to find fresh courage and focus from the past, to keep trusting and obeying the God of battles already won for his continuing victorious provision in all that lies ahead.^{xxvii}

¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ 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." Joshua 15,16 Joshua gave a final warning to the leaders. God was faithful, but now He expects us to be faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2^{xxviii}). And just as He was faithful to bless us when we obey, so He will also be faithful to punish us if we rebel. He gave us the land we possess, and He can take it away. If we are so rebellious as to worship other gods, we will perish quickly from off the good land He has given us. Joshua was just restating the blessing and curses the LORD spoke through Moses in Deuteronomy 28. He gave the Amorites and Canaanites 400 years to repent because they knew so little of God (Genesis 15:16^{xxix}). But we who know who God is and of His love and faithfulness are expected to be faithful now. God will not have as much patience with those who know better.

The same battle is before us today. Will we be satisfied with the LORD, or will we chase after the lures the world tempts us with? Their deception is powerful, and we must stay ever vigilant, or we will lose out on the blessings while we run after delusions that in the end will consume us. We see it happen to others and think we are more dedicated, but the enemy is subtle (Genesis 3:1^{xxx}). He watches for our weak moments. That is why Joshua is using terms like "do all" and "cling" and "be very careful." The enemy is still in the land. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers. The Word of God is our sword and faith is our shield (Ephesians 6:16,17^{xxxi}). It is by living the Word and standing on its promises that we overcome and remain strong. The battle isn't over until we see Him face to face and hear Him say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your Lord."* Matthew 25:21^{xxxii}

Questions:

- 1 What was on Joshua's heart and why?
- 2 What had the Lord done for them? For us?
- 3 What detracts us from taking all our land?
- 4 What were they to keep and do? Us?
- 5 How can "it's all by grace" be an excuse?
- 6 What are the gods/idols of this world?
- 7 What does "cling to the Lord" imply?
- 8 How did we get this far in our spiritual journey?
- 9 What must we be careful to do?
- 10 What was Joshua's final warning? Application?

ii **Psalm 128:6 (ESV)**

⁶ May you see your children's children! Peace be upon Israel!

ii **Psalm 103:2 (ESV)**

² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,

iii **Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)**

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

iv **Galatians 6:9 (ESV)**

⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

v **2 Timothy 2:3 (ESV)**

³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

vi **Luke 24:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

vii **John 15:12 (ESV)**

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

viii **Mark 16:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

ix **Colossians 3:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

x **Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

xi **1 John 2:15-17 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

xii **Joshua 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

xiii **2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (ESV)**

⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

xiv **Romans 8:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

xv **Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)**

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

xvi **Deuteronomy 5:32 (ESV)**

³² You shall be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

xvii **Psalm 16:4 (ESV)**

⁴ The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.

xviii Jackman, D, Preaching the Word - Joshua: People of God's Purpose.

^{xix} **John 12:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

^{xx} **John 15:5 (ESV)**

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

^{xxi} **2 Peter 1:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,
⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,

^{xxii} **Romans 8:31 (ESV)**

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

^{xxiii} **Deuteronomy 6:5 (ESV)**

⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

^{xxiv} **Psalms 7:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.

^{xxv} **Psalms 9:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God.

^{xxvi} **Romans 8:20-21 (ESV)**

²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope
²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

^{xxvii} *ibid*

^{xxviii} **1 Corinthians 4:2 (ESV)**

² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

^{xxix} **Genesis 15:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

^{xxx} **Genesis 3:1 (ESV)**

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”

^{xxxi} **Ephesians 6:16-17 (ESV)**

¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

^{xxxii} **Matthew 25:21 (ESV)**

²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’