

Joshua 15–22

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[0 : 00] And the scripture text is Joshua 15, verses 13 through 19. Please remain standing for the reading of God's word. According to the commandment of the Lord to Joshua, he gave Caleb the son of Jephunneh a portion among the people of Judah, Kiriath Arba, that is Hebron.

Arba was the father of Anak. And Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak, Shishai and Ahaman and Telmai, the descendants of Anak.

And he went up from there against the inhabitants of Deber. Now the name of Deber formerly was Kiriath Sefer. And Caleb said, whoever strikes Kiriath Sefer and captures it, to him will I give Aksa my daughter as wife.

And Othniel the son of Kinaz, the brother of Caleb, captured it. And he gave him Aksa his daughter as wife. When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field.

And she got off her donkey, and Caleb said to her, What do you want? She said to him, Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Negev. Give me also springs of water.

[1 : 09] And he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. Please turn to chapter 18 at verse 1. Then the whole congregation of the people of Israel assembled at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there.

The land lay subdued before them. There remained among the people of Israel seven tribes whose inheritance had not yet been apportioned. So Joshua said to the people of Israel, How long will you put off going in to take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you?

Provide three men from each tribe, and I will send them out, that they may set out and go up and down the land. They shall write a description of it with a view to their inheritances, and then come to me.

And then down at verse 9. So the men went and passed up and down in the land and wrote in a book a description of it by towns in seven divisions.

Then they came to Joshua to the camp at Shiloh. And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord. And there Joshua apportioned the land to the people of Israel, to each his portion.

[2 : 27] And turn to chapter 20, verse 7. So they set apart Kiddesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath Arba, that is Hebron, in the hill country of Judah.

And beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they appointed Bezer in the wilderness on the table land, from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh.

These were the cities designated for all the people of Israel and for the stranger sojourning among them, that anyone who killed a person without intent could flee there, so that he might not die by the hand of the avenger of blood till he stood before the congregation.

Then the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites came to Eleazar, the priest, and to Joshua, the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the people of Israel.

And they said to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, The Lord commanded through Moses that we be given cities to dwell in, along with their pasture lands for our livestock.

[3 : 39] And then down to verse 41. The cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the people of Israel were in all 48 cities with their pasture lands.

These cities each had its pasture lands around it, so it was with all these cities. Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give their fathers, and they took possession of it and settled there.

And the Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he has sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands.

Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed. All came to pass. At that time, Joshua summoned the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh and said to them, You have kept all that Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I have commanded you.

You have not forsaken your brothers these many days, down to this day, but have been careful to keep the charge of the Lord your God. And now the Lord your God has given rest to your brothers as he promised them.

[4 : 55] Therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you on the other side of the Jordan. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, just a couple of preliminary words.

Again, welcome if you are visiting with us. You've come on a day that the staff is wearing these crew neck sweatshirts and already downstairs you can register for your own and we'll make them available to you as we get them ordered in anticipation of our celebration next week.

But the thing I really want to say is you've probably just sat through the strangest or most odd reading of biblical texts that you'll ever see in a church service in your life.

So if you're new to coming along to church or new to this part of the Bible's record of this you can be sure that was an odd selection of texts that we asked to be read today.

[6 : 12] On the whole it's because we're in the midst of a summer series where we are working our way through the book of Joshua and we have two weeks to go and we see all of these chapters 15 through 22 concerning Israel's inheritance and the allotment of land to the tribes as was promised.

They have that banner over them all. They're organized as a straightforward list. You can see it for yourself in your own Bible in Joshua 15 through 22 the systematic allotment of land to the 12 respective tribes of Israel.

It's their inheritance and so we read of an inheritance given to Caleb and Judah to Benjamin and Zebulun Sibullun Issachar Naphtali and Asher Dan Joshua himself before we see cities that are given by way of allotment of cities of refuge and then land that is given to Levites who live in the midst of the people who dwell in the cities and then finally those tribes working their way back across the Jordan River to settle in the allotment of land that was given to them.

As you can see then if you look at the big swath of the latter part of Joshua we have a record by way of lineal descent inheritance of land that was promised.

I don't know if you know what lineal descent is it simply means blood relatives that are in direct line those are the ones who inherit based on what the heir passed along.

[8 : 17] To put it as simply as I can today we're in a text on inheritance which has me thinking what kind of inheritance are you going to get?

what kind of inheritance would you like to get? The subject of inheritance is touchy.

It's touchy because it comes down to bloodline it comes down to lineal descent it comes down to in some measure the family into which I was born and the ways in which those who preceded me were either building or not capital that could be passed on.

In addition to pour fuel on the conversation within our own country inheritance or your future windfall or not could also be affected by your ethnic legacy.

which of course gives rise to the contemporary conversations which we ought to have and which are often had in very conflicted and difficult rounds around one's notion of justice around one's notion of our nation's history around the idea of reparations more generally the ideas of race advantage opportunity of what constitutes what is right and righteousness in other words what I'm trying to say is the subject of these chapters which outline inheritance as a whole are alive and well in the psyche of our own minds inheritance so why not spend 25 minutes then thinking about inheritance the 12 tribes in this text are inheriting the respective portions of land promised to them by God because they were in the bloodline they were lineal descendants of Abraham who was the heir to all the promises that had been made to him centuries ago questions two of them for today what are we to make of this inheritance and how might it lead you to consider the kind of inheritance

[10 : 54] God would give to us what do we make of this inheritance and how might it consider in our minds the kind of inheritance God gives to us to get there let me just answer something that you would need to know if you've never read the Bible at all and I don't want to assume that you have you could almost say that the entire Bible could be told under the headline of inheritance it's a word

that's big enough to capture the whole the Bible actually presents us God's vantage point on inheritance from the very beginning both spiritually and materially remember the material blessings aren't the only thing that are handed down to you by those who preceded you the Bible opens and this you'll need to know it opens with what we have all inherited from our first parents

Adam and Eve that's the argument of the scriptures we have an inheritance from one man namely he passed down sin he passed down a ruptured relationship with the one from whom all blessings flow and as a consequence of that sin we have inherited a natural and universal separation from all that might have been good to us yes it's the problem that the Bible opens with in fact if you're reading Genesis for the first time you're struck are you not with chapters 5 through 11 where it's simply genealogy upon genealogy upon genealogy which is trying to indicate that the blood line of us all is failed in regard to a faith line that would inherit anything good from

God therefore we're under his judgment we're under his wrath the flood comes the whole story of Genesis 1-11 is a story of the inheritance that is universally ours namely ruptured with God and outside of his blessing the Bible continues this line on inheritance at chapter 12 with this old man by the name of Abram who becomes Abraham it's another man another person that God comes to and says let's talk about inheritance because the whole world is in a bad way with me that I plan on restoring and reversing so to you I will make a promise that you will become a great nation bloodline lineal descent and through you I will give a place in which will be marked out as fellowship with God and me in distinction from the world that does not know me and through you

Genesis 12 verse 3 says this all the families of the earth will be blessed in other words the story of the Bible is that the bloodline of us all which has failed in a faith line of blessing does now come to one man and a promise that all peoples of the earth can walk into an inheritance that God would have them be restored fellowship it's quite a thing then to watch how the Bible tells its own story you see this promise grow you see Abram and then his children Isaac and Jacob and Jacob's got 12 sons and now in our text these 12 sons descendants are inheriting a portion of that initial promise and you're still waiting though for how does the bloodline of the one family materially consummate in bringing the blessings to all families spiritually we're not that far in the

Bible story yet but by the end of the Bible be assured of this it's going to end on inheritance and it's going to say every tribe members from all peoples men and women who speak every tongue will stand before God and receive an inheritance based on the reception or not of the person or work of Jesus Christ which is why of course Jesus himself is introduced in Matthew 1 along the lines of lineal descent I'm going to tell you about Jesus well he was the son of Abraham son of David and then a list of lineal bloodline descent to argue that he is the fulfilling one who can reverse the fortunes in your life you got nothing today in your inheritance many of you don't looking to a parent to pass on something to you of value you're like there's nothing there feeling as though you live in a world where your rightful inheritance has unjustly been through the centuries given to others

[16 : 26] Jesus is the one who God says can reverse your fortunes into an inheritance that will eventuate in an everlasting supply of riches and honor and wealth and well-being I mean the whole Bible story just put it right inside the front cover a story on the inheritance that God has for me in fact and this is what I love about Joshua although we're at the latter end of the storyline here we've already seen bloodline get challenged I love this about Joshua don't you remember the story of Rahab she didn't have any inheritance in fact she was born into the wrong people group not only was she born into the wrong people group there were invaders of another people group under the purported promises of God that were going to take her out and yet as soon as God's people get into the land the first thing that happens as they begin to conquer all for themselves is God says

Rahab is among my own people he brings the outsider in and she shares in the inheritance of the whole now that's that's hopeful for you and for me that's hopeful for any man woman or child who feels like I was born outside of receiving anything good spiritually and materially the Bible already is saying well it's not bloodline anyway I mean he was mediating his work through bloodline but from the outset God's promise to Abraham by lineal descent was to have the effect of universal blessing which is why Jesus comes along and says you're not all children of Abraham because you're going to get this thing by faith not by family man if you got a messed up family you ought to be saying hallelujah if you don't have a nickel in your to your name you ought to be saying

God might have something yet for me in Christ if you feel that everything's been ripped out from under the rug you need to know that family line and faith line are two distinct things and if you get in the family of God through faith in Christ Jesus actually says well you're going to have houses and

mothers and brothers and sisters and friends all over the world that you wouldn't have had otherwise resources are going to be made available to you that were never there for anyone else because God is carrying this on and in fact when you depart from this place through your death you will actually inherit everlasting fellowship with God you will walk streets of gold you will have a room prepared you will have all your needs met forevermore Rahab got it the Gibeonites got it didn't you love that a few weeks ago these people that tricked their way into the people of God they became slaves of Israel but nevertheless they were vertical they had work to do they were counted among God's people they were outsiders who inherited the land of which they originally thought they had no portion Caleb who we heard about last week may also have been an outsider did you notice last week three times in the reading Caleb this hero of the faith who emulates the inheritance he's the first one to get his land he's actually a Kenizzite if you trace a Kenizzite word through back into Genesis it's not actually his family history doesn't actually go through the bloodline tree of Israel it's possible that Caleb himself was an early outsider who made his way into the family so Joshua with lineal descent now apportioning among the 12 tribes is already a story that's challenging bloodline

Rahab's in and you can get into the Gibeonites are in and you can get into Caleb is in and still productive and you can be productive too in other words it's what Jesus ends up or Paul ends up saying concerning the work of Jesus by the time it's all done there's neither slave nor free no the Gibeonite nor Israel there's neither male nor female which we'll see but but actually the promises can go to anyone what kind of inheritance are you going to get what kind of an inheritance does God want to give you in our text today there are other surprises can I just highlight four quickly as we move through the reasons for which we chose the selected readings when it comes to the inheritance that God wants to give you men and women are joint heirs now I know that you may have heard the accusation against the Bible that it is strictly patriarchal and

[21 : 59] I know that the names which are proportioned out here as far as the ones who are receiving them are always the sons of the one who come from Jacob yet I know that embedded in the story itself in the story the promises are given to men and women equal joint heirs in the promise didn't you see the reading there with the daughter and she comes to Caleb and says would you you've given me this land would you also apportion me this and the inheritance is given to her do you see later also in chapter 16 someone which we didn't read about verse 3 Zelophehad!

in fact he had five daughters and those five daughters are way back in the time of Moses and now at this time they are receiving their inheritance verse 4 they approached Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of none and the leaders and said the Lord commanded Moses to give us an inheritance along with our brothers so according to the mouth of the Lord he gave them an inheritance according to their brothers of their fathers verse 6 because the daughters of Manasseh received the inheritance along with his sons the scriptures themselves are already foreshadowing the inheritance that God wants to give is not only not along bloodline it's certainly not along gender line it certainly doesn't allow people to level a straightforward accusation against the scriptures that the God of the Old Testament has no bearing on women the story is arguing otherwise Rahab Caleb's daughter the five daughters of

Zelophehad this is what I want you to hear there's a present misunderstanding today about the Bible and it concerns gender but what you find in 1st Peter is equal to what you find here that we are all joint heirs there ought to be no patriarchal male dominant sense that is allowed to thrive outside of this understanding and yet too often these things do occur so then what's already emerging in the Old Testament is what the New Testament makes clear when it comes to the inheritance we all get an equal share in Christ we are all valued by Christ we are all equal in our standing with Christ we are all brothers and sisters the

Bible surprises don't let non readers of it dissuade you from reading it for yourself and making up your own mind on what kind of God is revealed in the Old Testament interestingly the God of the Old Testament is quite kind long suffering forgiving magnanimous when it comes to the inheritance God wants to give you both men and women are joint heirs secondly in these chapters you'll see that justice and mercy define the social fabric justice and mercy are the characteristics of the inheritance that God would give that really came from chapter 20 and verse 1 and 7 through 9 let me read it again this relates to the cities of refuge that are set aside within the land appoint the cities of refuge of which I spoke to you through Moses and then in 7 to 9 you have six cities which are set apart as cities of refuge and it closes in verse 9 by saying the kind of inheritance that

God wants to give us embeds justice and mercy in the social fabric the Bible takes away the notion then that vengeance can be taken away from a collective consideration of guilt or innocence the Bible does not permit you to take justice into your own hands the Bible does not allow you to say I have been injured in this way in this sense through the loss of a loved one and therefore you turn around and take someone out in the other family it doesn't allow it the warfare on the streets which takes vengeance into his own hand is put at bay in these chapters by saying my kingdom will distinguish between intentional and unintentional murder and my kingdom will not allow an individual to take the law under their own hands until the individual has stood before the congregation

[27 : 21] I love this think of our own culture today our own laws think of our own citizenry our own streets think of our need to allow access to the system the judicial system think of the need to say we cannot pronounce this until this has its fair hearing all of these things are part of the inheritance that God will give they're all part of the things that a church like this ought to be concerned with distinguishing between cases in a collective judiciary rather than the unwielding of a social fabric as each one does what is right in their own eyes third not only are men and women joint heirs to the inheritance!

God would give us not only is justice and mercy the definition of the social fabric but third good Bible teaching was readily accessible to every Israelite on the basis of this text how do I get there look at 21 within chapter 21 the Levites are dispersed throughout the land they didn't get their own land they were dispersed throughout the land because of their function for the whole Deuteronomy 33 10 indicate very clearly that the role of the Levites was to teach Jacob my rules and Israel my laws now imagine the city of Chicago imagine having to go to only one place to hear the Bible to hear what God has to say it would make so many people left without access to the scriptures but God in the economy of Israel actually dispersed the Levitical priesthood not giving them a land of their own but embedding them within all the tribes so that they would perform the regular function that within every neighborhood in

Israel somebody was there who could open the Bible and explain it to the people so they knew how to live in God's kingdom another way to put it is simply this a mark of the inheritance is access to the regular and sustained teaching of the Bible that is faithful to God's word it's decentralized it's democratized it ought to be street by street neighborhood by neighborhood corner by corner we ought not to rest until every citizen in the city of Chicago has good Bible teaching within their earshot of their own walking distance why because if we forget God if we don't know his word we're going to create a city that's a mess put differently we have a city that's a mess because the church has not yet sorted out how to provide good adequate Bible teaching within the earshot of every citizen and yet here it is the

Levites are not given a land the tribes were to give some of their land to the Levites the Levites were dispersed! they were embedded so that the whole would be served through access to God's word and Levites were really forerunners to preachers and teachers who provided for by the larger populace but who provide the populace God's word you're not going anywhere in life until you know God's word and we ought to make it as common as good drinking water four not only does the inheritance that God wants to give Israel and therefore us put us all as joint heirs does it not only put justice and mercy in the fabric of our life not only does it make the scriptures readily accessible to all but it safeguards our unity you have to have unity when an inheritance is distributed think of all the family messes that occur all the fights that take place in court and otherwise because nobody can agree on how we're supposed to relate together once the inheritance is doled out which is really what's going on in chapter 22

I didn't read all chapter 22 but it's a fascinating story of the tribes that went back across the Jordan to get their own land but before they left they built a big old monument and the folks that were left in the land look at the monument and said you have got to be kidding me we are finally done warring and you're now building this idle monument to sacrifice to gods like Peor and the others did in our history and all of a sudden the whole family is almost at war until Israel does the smart thing they safeguard unity by having people go speak with those to get a true understanding of what's going on and once the understanding is there a misunderstanding can be corrected a misstep could be corrected a mess can even be corrected!

[32 : 49] That is the kind of inheritance God wants to give you today He wants you to be part of a family where you inherit the promises of Christ into everlasting joy and goodness and as such he

wants you to be part of a local family where men and women are valued equally as inheritors of the kingdom where justice and mercy are part of the social fabric of our life together he wants you to be part of a family where the scriptures themselves are central so you know how to live your life well and he wants you to be part of a family where you're willing to keep short accounts and mend fences and stop to have conversations so that the family of God is protected from division and if we do it well then we'll die and other people will sit in these seats they will pick up the work where we left off and we will enter in to an eternal inheritance that is kept in heaven for you that will never fade away and you and me though you may be the poorest of the poor the most maligned of the maligned will everlastingly be on the inside with endless treasures while others who had all their fill now may be on the outside into everlasting want what kind of inheritance are you going to get may we want the one that

God wants to give our heavenly father help us as a church family to live well in light of your word we give ourselves to it week by week and to one another and and lord as we prepare to walk out today I just want to ask for your help next Sunday as we celebrate well may our eyes be lifted to you in praise of all that you've done in Christ's name amen well let's get on our faith