

Joshua 23

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[0 : 00] chapter 23. This can be found in the Pew Bibles on page 187. Again, that's 187. Again, the text is Joshua 23, page 187 of the Pew Bible.

Please stand out of reverence for God's Word. A long time afterwards, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, 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, 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.

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.

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.

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, 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, but you shall cling to the Lord your God, just as you have done to this day.

[1 : 49] 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. 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.

Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God. 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, 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.

And now, I'm 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. 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, 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

[3 : 34] Please be seated. Just a special word of greeting to Mary Carol Backstrom.

I saw that she's here today. It's welcome. It's great to have you back from Malaysia, and I look forward to catching up with you. It's also wonderful to have Val Uly here and Kevin Yope, long-time members of Holy Trinity, but not often in our own congregation anymore as they are serving downtown.

It's just great to know that you're here and that you're still active in service to the Lord. You're a great encouragement to us, all of you. Well, we're drawing near to the conclusion of our time in the book of Joshua.

I think we've come to what could rightly be considered some of the final words of Joshua. Now, more than likely close to age 110.

The church has always placed special significance on the last words of her leaders.

[5 : 06] When Samuel Rutherford was on his deathbed, someone was close by with pen in hand and recorded his dying testament.

Dear brethren, do all for him. Pray for Christ. Preach for Christ. Do all for Christ. Beware of men pleasing.

The chief shepherd will shortly appear. And with those words, Samuel Rutherford walked off the pages of human history.

John Wesley's final declaration was captured as well. He said, The best of all is God is with us. And he would repeat those words three times in succession.

God is with us. And then he expired with the word farewell. Dwight L. Moody of Chicago, that famous evangelist and preacher and teacher and founder of so many organizations, his closing words were captured as well.

[6 : 19] The ailing preacher was roused from his sleep and in slow measured words said this, Earth recedes, heaven opens for me.

Prior to that, he had called his family and colleagues to his bedside and had given particular instructions to those who would lead various aspects of the work that God had raised up under him upon his demise.

This idea of an individual's final words and Moody's example, particularly of bringing future leaders to his bedside, is pertinent when we think of our own text before us today.

There are at least two indicators in the text itself that these are Joshua's last words. Among them, we'll conclude even next week.

There's a contextual marker that they're not only his last words, but these are last words for those who will lead when he goes.

[7 : 38] Take a look. This phrase in verse 1, an indicator that Joshua was old and advanced in years.

The same idea being heralded from his own mouth in verse 14, and now I am about to go the way of all the earth. This sense that we have come to the words of a man at the end of his life.

The second indicator in the text itself, this verse 2 of chapter 23, Joshua summoned. He had words to speak at the conclusion of his life.

The contextual marker of the last three chapters, in fact, indicate that he is summoning, almost as if it were to his bedside, varieties of groups within the family of God that he might have one last word for them.

Take a look at chapter 22. We were there last week. At that time, Joshua summoned the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

[8 : 57] Well, at what time? Well, after the land had been apportioned. After what began all the way back in chapter 13, verse 1, where there too we saw Joshua was now old and advanced in age.

So this aged leader in chapter 22 summons a particular portion of the family that he might give to them his parting words.

Chapter 24, he will do the same thing. Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.

And he said to all the people. Chapter 22, I have final words for the two and a half tribes. Chapter 24, I have a word for all the tribes.

Chapter 23, a long time afterward, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies and Joshua was old and advanced in years, Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers.

[10 : 22] Calvin, in his commentary, takes this little phrase, all Israel, to mean that they were, in a sense, there because their representative leadership was there.

He writes, from it being said that he invited all Israel, and it being immediately after added that he invited their elders, heads, judges, and prefects, I understand the meaning to be that all were indeed permitted to come, but that the summons was addressed specially to the heads and prefects.

And thus, the last clause appears to be the explanatory of the former. The sense, therefore, says Calvin, in which the people were invited was simply this, that their elders, judges, and others were commanded to come.

If that's true, and given the context of 22 and 24, where we have all the tribes indicated in 24, then the words of the text that were read for us today are last words, yes, but specifically for those who would lead.

The elders, heads, judges, and officers. The elders, of course, would have been those who, by nature of age and rank and character, were recognized formally and informally as leaders within the people of the family of God.

[12:07] The officers, those who would indeed go out and among and even to war. The judges, interestingly, that phrase judge there, the word judge has its roots all the way back in the early days when Joshua was a young man, an assistant under Moses, and Moses himself was adjudicating law in the midst of the people from sunup till sundown, and Jethro comes to him in chapter 18 and says, this is not healthy for you or the people.

You ought to appoint judges. And so early on, this family of God had a number of individuals who were adjudicating law and serving the people.

So here they are, gathered before Joshua, last words for those who would lead.

Well, what's on the mind of a man near death? What words does one pass on to the coming generation who must take up the mantle of leadership?

What words does he want them to remember? Verses 3 to 5, he wants them to know, the Lord God, the Lord your God, has been and will be the one responsible for your success.

[13:40] It's the first thing that he really indicates. Verses 3 to 5, he says, 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. Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with the nations that I have already cut off from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the West.

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. That is his emphasis, his first emphatic phrase.

The Lord your God has fought for you. The Lord your God will fight for you according to the Lord your God's promises that were given to you.

I don't think these words would have been coming off his lips with some great force, kind of youthful power. This is an old man who's gathered the leaders and he knows them by name.

[14:52] He says, You have seen it. You have seen what the Lord God has done for you. That little phrase, You have seen it.

And then he says, Behold, or see that which I have done. Even the fact that he has allotted all of the land is merely an indication that the Lord God has fulfilled his word.

He calls them together. First thing on his mind, As I go the way of all the earth, remember this, the Lord your God is the reason behind any success that you have seen.

It's a wonderful phrase because this was a this was a earnest group of individuals. This was a generation that was continually at work taking new ground.

You see in the early chapters of Judges that this generation and the elders themselves, they they were obedient. They were laborers.

[16:14] They knew what it was to take weight. And the word is the Lord God has done it all. Wonderful wonderful reminder for a man and for the leaders that the Lord God has sustained the work, the Lord God has accomplished the work, the Lord God will be the one to complete the work according to all that the Lord your God promises.

He is the one. So as I even stand here today and look out upon many of you, even officers in the church and elders and recognized leaders, all of us really, in some sense, can understand and should remember that it is the Lord God who accomplishes all that He has done.

The second phrase, though, beginning at verses 6 to 11, he moves from this indication that the Lord God is responsible for this success to the issue of loyalty and loyalty to the book of law as required for their ongoing success.

loyalty. Verse 6, Therefore, be strong to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses.

Loyalty to the book of the law of Moses. What a full phrase. There it is for you. The book of the law of Moses.

[17 : 51] I mean, it's just titled. Loyalty. Loyalty. Loyalty to the revealed Word of God. This little phrase had an important place.

This book did in the life of Joshua. I want you to turn back in your Bible to Deuteronomy 31 and you'll see that even there when he was being commissioned to lead, the text of God's Word is central.

Deuteronomy 31 23, and the Lord commissioned Joshua the son of Nun and said, Be strong and courageous for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to them.

I will be with you. When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book to the very end, Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, take the book of the law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God that it may be there for a witness against you.

The Lord commissioned this young man, Joshua, to be strong and courageous and he puts the book of the law before him.

[19 : 23] It's been a book that was by Joshua's side now for over four decades. It also was a book that had great significance to him at the beginning of our own book.

Take a look at Joshua chapter 1. Not only does this phrase, the book of the law, appear as commissioning, but it appears in the words that God speaks to him after Moses dies.

For our book, Joshua 1.1, opens with the death of Moses and the word of the Lord coming to him. Verse 2, Moses, my servant, is dead.

And when you get to verses 7 and 8, the Lord is saying only be very strong and courageous, being careful to do all the law that Moses, my servant, commanded you, do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left that you may have good success wherever you go.

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth. Neither. but you shall meditate on it day and night.

[20 : 47] The words of the Lord to Joshua were to be strong, to courageous, to keep the law, not go to the left or the right. These are the very words he is now passing on to the generation that would follow him.

This same phrase, this book of the law was also present in the middle of our book at a very important time in Joshua's life, chapter 8. That season in which there was a reconstitution of the people of God around the covenant or the revealed word of God.

You can see it there in chapter 8 and verse 31. Just as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded the people of Israel as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones upon which no man has wielded an iron tool and they offered on it burnt offerings and he moves forward with it.

There is a call to them at Ebal to obey every word that has come forth from this book of the law. Now, why do I pause there for a moment?

Because it's important for us to recognize that when he is calling them to loyalty to the book of the law of the Moses, this is the revealed word of God, the Torah, Genesis through Deuteronomy that was given to God's people that was present at his own commissioning that was reaffirmed as the Lord spoke to him directly and that which he put before the people when they called forth blessings and curses from one mountain top to the other.

[22 : 26] It's the book that was with him all his life and when he's ready to die, he looks at the leaders and basically says, the book that I've lived my life by is the one that you are to show your loyalty to.

Yes, the Lord, your God, has granted you success wherever you've gone, but your success will depend on your wholehearted loyalty to his revealed word.

And why not? I mean, think of what we're even given in Genesis through Deuteronomy. I mean, what would we know of God had it not been for those wonderful books?

For it is in these books that we learn that the Lord our God created the heavens and the earth. These books are the ones that express to us the great human problem in regard to our sin and disobedience.

These books reveal that God promises to bless all of us through the seed of Abraham. Abraham. These books give us a pattern in Israel's history for what redemption will look like so that just as they left Exodus via the blood on the sign of the door, so too we have a pattern of God's revelation that he will save a people for himself, that he will call the people unto himself, and the sign of that

saving is blood.

[24 : 02] And as they arrive at the mountain to worship, we understand that his word is that which goes forth. So he saves us by his blood. He secures us in his word. These books show all of that.

Joshua itself indicated to us that even those who are marked out for judgment, who never received God's revelation, that there is a means of escape by the cutting of covenant with God's people.

All these things are given to us in the book of the law of Moses. I'm aware that some people will begin to accuse me and others, perhaps even you, of some sort of strange bibliolatry, some sort of elevation of the text as above the spirit of the text.

Well, they can accuse me if they want. I love this book because, as Moses said, these words are your life.

The book of the law reveals the life to be had in God. Ultimately, even this law that was given to Joshua and those who would follow him is built upon by the prophets and the writings and finds its ultimate fulfillment in the person and the work of Jesus Christ, who is the final revelation of God.

[25 : 35] And he is the one who tells us to keep his commandments. Loyalty to God's word is critical for any who would lead.

How do you do it then? Well, our text gives us a positive way to do it and then by way of negative shows us how not to be doing it. It says, verse 6, therefore, be very strong to keep.

Or to keep it. Or verse 8, but you shall cling. This is what future leaders need to demonstrate as an evidence of their loyalty to God's word.

A keeping of it. A clinging to it. I love the word cling most especially. It was first used in the Hebrew scriptures in the opening chapters of Genesis 2, verse 24, to speak of the man and woman relationship.

Where they're to cling. In other words, there is this notion of holding fast to one another. Of being united solely to this one.

[26 : 48] cling to the word of God in this way. I often wonder if Joshua, as he was saying these words, these very words, he could almost hear the voice, the tone, the intonation, and the diction of Moses.

For this word cling is a Moses word. And he heard it from Moses' mouth. There are times perhaps you've done it. I know it's happened to me many times. The older I get.

There are moments when you're speaking, when you almost have this sense of, was that my voice or my father's voice? Or mother's voice as the case may be.

Or grandfather's voice. Where you could almost hear them in your own voice. So it is here with Joshua at the close of his life.

Moses' words were continually brought forth in Joshua's presence to cling to God's word.

[28 : 02] Deuteronomy 4, verse 4, but you who hold fast to the Lord your God are all alive today.

The same word is cling. Deuteronomy chapter 10 and verse 20. Again, the voice of Moses.

You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. You shall cling to Him.

Deuteronomy 11, verse 22, For if you will be careful to do all the commandment that I command you to do, loving the Lord your God, walking in all His ways, and holding fast to Him.

These are phrases that Joshua heard Moses say on more than one occasion. It's in a sense than when we hear Joshua's voice to future leaders.

It's merely the echo of Moses. Hold fast! How do you express loyalty to the Word?

[29 : 14] You hold fast to it! And in this day and age, that will be ever more important.

for all around us, leaders in the church are relinquishing their hold on the revealed Word of God and thereby ensuring a lack of spiritual success in His sight.

That's what you're to do. Negatively speaking, you're not to be commingling your life and language with something else.

That's really the phrase there. Again, back to verse 6 and 7, 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, that you may not mix.

When I think of that word mix, I almost think of cooking or things in the kitchen and liquids and different things that are mixed together to create something.

[30 : 32] But when it comes to the law of the Lord, there's no commingling. How do you express your loyalty to the Lord your God? By not commingling what's revealed here with what's revealed in the world as presentable before God?

He even goes on to just say you're not to mention these other names. You're not to swear by them. You're not to serve them. You're not to pile down to them. The chapter before, there were these wonderful examples of what commingling looked like.

It was the sin at Peor, where they began to worship the baes of Peor and began to live lives of licentiousness, particularly in regard to sensuality, sexuality.

It was a mixing. It was a letting go of life. Or the sin of Achan, who hid what he had, and was told never to take and call his own.

You are to keep. You are not to commingle. And notice in the text, this is what demonstrates your love of God.

[31 : 52] Verse 11, be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God. That's the summary. How do you know if you love God? Show me how you are relating to his revealed word, and whether you are keeping it, clinging to it, and staying away from things that would advance another line of thought.

Your love for God is wedded to your love for his word. You can't have it any other way, especially if you would lead.

So a word for those who would lead, you have a word to keep. And then he moves on and finishes with a warning to remember.

Verses 12 to the end really begin to shift from that word there to keep to a warning in light of it. I mean, look at the emphasis of the text there, beginning at verse 12.

For if you turn back and cling, there's our word again, to the remnant of these nations remaining among you, and make marriages with them so that you associate with them, and they with you, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you.

[33 : 19] If you turn back and cling, know for certain that. It's a warning to remember. Look at verse 13, 15, and 16.

They all indicate that this is a warning. Verse 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.

Verse 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. These last words, in other words, the goodness of God can be exchanged for his anger and a quick end.

Don't you love the emphasis on all that was good? In the reading of the text, verse 16, not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God has promised you.

[34 : 26] Verse 15, but just as all the good things that he promised you, later again, you will be destroyed from off this good land. And then finally, the very end of the text, from off the good land that God has given you.

If you want to experience God's goodness in the coming generations, then may it be demonstrated through a loyalty to his word, by a clinging to it, a keeping of it, by not commingling and knowing the consequences of turning, that the goodness of God is quickly exchanged changed.

Well, a last word for those who would lead. Remember well, it is the Lord God who is responsible for all your success.

Remember well, he requires a loyalty to his word for continued success. Remember well, a loss of God's goodness and a quick end awaits all those who abandon it.

Our Heavenly Father, we come at the close of this service now and we think of your revelation to us supremely in your Son and we ask, oh Lord, that our lives would hold fast to the apostolic witness concerning him as the fulfillment of all that is promised here.

[36 : 00] and we pray that our lives would be marked by the notion of being a people of the word for your glory and for our own good.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Well, why don't you stand?