

Two Sure Things

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Preacher: Andy Prideaux

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 6th of May 2001. The preacher is Andrew Pridot.

His sermon is entitled Two Sure Things and is from Joshua chapter 1 verses 2 to 6 and chapter 21 verses 43 to 45.

My name is Andy Pridot and I go to the morning congregation here and I'm a link missionary, a home missionary with Doncaster working with the Christian Union at Monash Uni.

And last week and this week we're taking a brief look into Joshua and we're continuing that tonight, focusing on especially the end of Joshua, Joshua 21, which is in the first column of the sheet there. But before we look at that, let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for tonight. We thank you for bringing your people together. We thank you that you are here with us, that you speak to us through your word.

[1 : 15] Please give us listening ears and hearts that are willing to change in response to your word tonight. For we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. You've got two sheets.

Sorry about the paper warfare on the way in. One of them has a biblical theology of rest on it. I want you to take that sheet now and put it under your seat. You're not allowed to look at it during this talk, during this service.

Forget about it. That's to take home. It's a takeaway sheet and I'll explain that later. But you will need the other sheet because it has the passage on it and the translation I'm using and a bit of an outline that might help you follow the talk.

So the other one under the seat, but have the other one in front of you if you can. That would be good. Now, as you know, there are many sure things in life.

Beatles records. You know, the greatest band of all time, the Beatles. No doubt about that. You can guarantee that every one of their 13 records that they released is brilliant.

[2 : 24] If you doubt that, you can come around to my house one time. We'll have a listening session. I'll prove it to you. There's no such thing as a bad Beatles record. That's a sure thing. Melbourne weather.

It's predictable that it will be unpredictable. That's a sure thing. You will get four seasons in one day. Although, today's beautiful day belies that a bit, I must admit.

Taxes. Another certain thing. No matter who is in power. No matter who you vote for. Until the end of your days, you will pay taxes. Now, this next one might be a startling statistic for some of you.

But death? It's a sure thing that 100% of people in this room will die. In fact, 100% of people in this country will die.

It's a sure thing. Sure things. You see, and we'll see it again tonight, as you read through Joshua, sure things.

[3 : 27] In fact, these things are not just sure in Joshua, but sure in the whole of the Bible. Because the Bible is a book, amongst other things, about two sure things.

What are they? The first sure thing is this. God will always be faithful to his promises. God will always be faithful to his promises.

That's the first sure thing. The second sure thing is that human beings will be unfaithful to their God. Human beings will be unfaithful to their God.

Two sure things. It's true of God and people in the Bible. It's true of God and people at every stage of history, including our own. Now, last week we looked at the Battle of Jericho.

And I noted last week that that chapter, that story, really sets the theme right up until the end of chapter 12 of the book of Joshua.

[4 : 28] The theme of the complete victory of Israel against all her enemies. The enemies of God and his people in the land. And if you read chapter 12, you get this great list of the evil kings who are supplanted, their places taken by God's kingdom.

In those chapters, chapters 6 to 12, we see judgment fall upon the enemies of God. And we see blessing fall upon his undeserving people.

Now, what happens next in Joshua chapters 13 to 21 is that the land that God's people have now inherited is divided up.

And God's people, each tribe, settle in their own allotted portion. If you read through, it's a description in those chapters of how this happens and which bit each tribe gets.

And finally, we get to the culmination of all of that in tonight's passage. At the end of your first column there from chapter 21 of Joshua verse 43, we read this.

[5 : 36] So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers.

Not one of their enemies withstood them. The Lord handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed. Everyone was fulfilled.

That's really a summary of the whole book, I think. Have a look there at verse 43 there. That's really what chapters 13 to 21 are about.

God's people going in, taking possession of, and settling in the land. Have a look at verse 44 there. That's really what chapters 1 to 12 are about. God, rather God's people having rest from their enemies, their battles over.

And verse 45 really states the key theme of the whole lot. God is completely faithful to all his covenant promises.

[6 : 44] Now, way back in Joshua 1, Amri read that for us as well, the top of the first column there. We had this anticipation that God was going to give Israel the whole land. And now, at the end of chapter 21, a lot's happened.

We see that goal realised. Now, we haven't done with those verses yet. I want to have a bit more of a look at chapter 21, verses 43 to 5.

Again, on the first column there. Verse 43. God had made promises to Israel's forefathers. Way back from Abraham in Genesis 12, He made some specific promises.

He promised His people land. He promised His people many descendants. He promised them a blessing. He promised them that through them, the nations would be blessed.

I've got lots of references there on the sheet, which you can look up later, which show these promises being made to Abraham and then to his children. They're reiterated and built upon and fleshed out.

[7 : 45] And there's one verb that keeps coming up again and again, and it came up again tonight, and that is gave, or the verb to give. And God is the one who gives it. God's doing it. He did it.

But that doesn't mean that Israel does nothing. While God gave the people the land, Israel had to take it. We see that in verse 43 there. Israel's obedience is emphasised.

They weren't like their forefathers. They didn't shrink back in fear. No, they took possession of the land. They inherited it. They settled there. It's very exciting when you read chapters 13 to 21 of Joshua and you see the precise descriptions of the allotments happening, again emphasising what is said here, that God keeps His promises.

All of the land is given to them. In verse 44, the situation is also described in terms of God giving them rest, giving them rest on every side.

Again, just as He had sworn to their forefathers. And what that means, as we go on to read to see, is that when all the battles were finally over, they had rest from their enemies.

[8 : 58] There's no more threat from the outside, no more need to take up arms. They could rest. They could enjoy this new land that they'd been given to live in.

Rest at this point meant they could settle down and enjoy living as one people with God in His place. It's almost a return to Eden.

And many times in the Old Testament, Canaan is described as a land flowing with milk and honey in these sort of idyllic terms. It seems to be the beginning of the realisation of a goal that God had way back in creation.

The seventh day God rests. Very interesting day because it has no night. All the other ones have day and then it was night and then the next day comes around. There's no night in this rest. It's meant to go on.

God's creation are meant to go on enjoying this rest with God. So maybe we're going to see new creation again here. Maybe now in the land we'll see all the nations sharing this blessing.

[10:06] Maybe this is it. We'll have to wait and see if that's the case. Verse 45. Do you notice how many times the word all or every is used in these verses?

It's comprehensive what God has done. The point is that God has been completely faithful. Not one of all the Lord's good promises, literally good words to the house of Israel failed.

Everyone was fulfilled. And this is the only point in Joshua that the phrase, the house of Israel is used to describe God's people.

This is Israel together, undivided, sharing the blessings of God. God's words never fail. They never fall. God always does what he says he will do. And I think when we doubt, we need to remember and believe in his words to us tonight.

We need to remember the faithful God that we have. God is faithful. He doesn't let us down. He doesn't let us down.

[11:13] It's an ideal picture, isn't it? One of the brightest descriptions of the relationship between God and his people in the whole of the Old Testament. It's an amazing picture, but it's only half the story.

Remember the two sure things. If God is consistently faithful, his people sadly are consistently unfaithful to him.

And really the focus in these verses in chapter 21 is on God, isn't it? He's on centre stage. He's the one who's done it. Not even the great leader Joshua gets a mention here.

But in the covenant relationship between God and his people, God is but one half. And there are some cracks in the vase. If you think of the relationship between God and Israel as like a beautiful vase, there are cracks in this vase, strains in the relationship, which are just beginning to be visible in this book.

And water is starting to seep through. By the end of Judges, the next book in the Bible, and a book which overlaps in time with this one, we'll see just how long this vase will hold together.

[12:25] And we'll also see that while God keeps every one of his promises to bless, that he's also made promises to judge sin too. And he also keeps those promises.

We often forget that. Yes, God promises great things. He also promises that he will judge sin. And he keeps that promise too. Let me read to you one of these in Joshua 23, verse 15, just after the bit we had read tonight.

But just as every good promise of the Lord your God has come true, so the Lord will bring on you all the evil he has threatened until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them.

So what are these cracks in the vase? Well, in the second and third column on your sheet there, which we didn't have read out, here are some cracks that just sort of sneak into Joshua here that give us a hint that all is not right.

Firstly, though, from chapter 7, you'll have to read this later, Achan disobeyed the Lord and he tried to keep the loot for himself. I don't know if you remember, Jericho, Israel were commanded to put that loot aside for the building of the temple.

[13:46] Achan keeps it for himself and his family. This, for a time, frustrates them taking the next town after Jericho, which is Ai. They're unable to take it for a while. It also results in the death of 36 Israelites.

It's one crack in the vase. Or consider Joshua himself, the great leader. He knows that success only comes from the Lord. And yet, unwittingly, he enters into a treaty with the Gibeonites, a people in the land.

Not meant to do that. And he does that because he does not consult the Lord. It's chapter 9 of Joshua. Consider the hints there in the second column. I've taken a few references out of chapters 15, 16, 17 and 18.

In all of these instances, Israel have failed to remove all the peoples from the land, which was what they were commanded to do. And at some points, they've even tried to work in with them, to find a

compromise, perhaps.

And these cracks become even more pronounced by the end of the first chapter of Judges, printed out for you in the third column there. You can read that later.

[14 : 55] What do you find there? Basically, a great list of peoples that Israel have failed to evict or destroy in the land. Same problem.

Now, all of these passages help us to explain a tension that we see in the books of Joshua and Judges. You see, because at one level you get this description, this ideal picture of a complete victory, a complete conquest, a complete settlement.

And that's true. God did fulfill his promises. As a whole, as a unified force, the nations are no longer a threat to Israel. Well, God's people rest in the land.

But, on another level, God's people have failed to completely take advantage of all that God has given them.

Pockets of resistance remain in the land that will still need to be dealt with. It's a bit like the ideal of the law which God gave his people. They have this law.

[15 : 59] If they keep it, they will live a blessed life with God and each other. But just because they've been given it doesn't mean that they then choose to keep it.

Yes, Joshua is a very positive and optimistic book because it teaches us, yes, God is faithful. God is faithful to his promises, to his covenant. But it's also a realistic book.

Sin is still a reality and still doing damage amongst his people. Sin is still a reality and still doing damage amongst his people. Sin is still a reality and still doing damage amongst his people.

Essentially what we're reading about here is how very different Israel's attitude to evil is compared to God's.

That's the nub of it. How different their plans for how they think they're going to enjoy life in the land are from God's plans. you see instead of completely ridding the land of what pollutes it it's false gods it's idolatry as the lord commanded israel tries to reach a compromise they're prepared to go so far with god but not all the way see they see the great goal that god has for them in the land they're even beginning to taste it but they also see the attractive things about the other nations the fool's gold that's still lying around the place and and they think well god's giving us this but maybe we need to hold on to a bit of this for a bit of insurance maybe the lord will let us down look these nations they have they have these gods they have these ways of doing things maybe we just need to hold a little bit back surely that's okay a bit of insurance i don't know if you remember the story that jesus told in matthew 13 verse 45 and 6 about it's about the kingdom of heaven and he describes it as a pearl of great price now it's as if the israelites at this point are retelling that story in this way let me read out to you this amended version the kingdom of god is heaven rather is like a merchant looking for fine pearls when he found one of great value he went away and sold most of what he had keeping some back just in case and and bought it kingdom of heaven doesn't work like that though does it this is what jesus actually said the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls when he found one of great value he went away and sold everything he had and bought it you can't have a little bit both ways you see you can't have god on your own terms either he is your god or he's not and it doesn't work for israel either have a look at god's verdict in judges chapter two this is uh on the fourth column there let me let me read this verdict out to you i'm sorry it's been chopped off again on the end there of the sheet we'll try and decipher it the angel of the lord went up from gilgal to bokim and said i brought you up out of egypt and led you into the land that i swore to give to your forefathers i said i will never break my covenant with you and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land but you shall break down their altars yet you have disobeyed me why have you done this now therefore i tell you that i will not drive them out before you they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you when the angel of the lord had spoken these things to all the israelites the people wept aloud and they called that place balkim there they offered sacrifices to the lord the tragic irony for israel is that the very things that they held on to for a bit of extra insurance security the people their wealth their gods these things that they thought might bring them life are the very things that would end up taking away everything good that god was giving them free of charge the new eden has been compromised and it won't work for them won't be a place of blessing for them because they're leaving god out of the picture god will give them what they want he won't drive these peoples out that's what they want he'll give them what they want but it won't deliver there will be thorns in your sides a snare a trap to you

see what these verses are saying it's not that god was letting them down so that they had no other choice but to find hope in some of these other things no god wanted to bless them beyond measure what's the issue here what's going on why do they do this well it's the same with all sinners and think about it why do christians why do we as god's people keep on sinning why do we do it god tells us it's no good he tells us it destroys relationships he tells us it results in judgment why do we do it i think one of the reasons is because we forget all that god has for us in christ and so we devalue that pearl of great price and we start looking for other treasure to then fill the gap we get sucked into the counterfeit pearls that the that our sin the world and the devil hold out to us in place of jesus and the life that he brings us i take it this is why we hold on to our money instead of giving it away what if i don't have enough this is why we block out from our thinking the possibility of being a missionary in a third world country what about health care what about salary what what what about what about schooling for the kids this is why we don't share the gospel with our with our friends at school what if they think i'm an idiot what if they don't like me anymore this is why we don't pray life's too busy if i don't do things it won't happen that's why the rich young ruler walked away from jesus sad you see jesus told him to sell all that he had and give it to the poor and come and follow him the problem was this guy was really rich or so he thought why do we sin because we don't believe god when he says to us i'll give you every blessing in christ just leave sin and death behind and come and follow me we don't trust him so we don't obey him well how do we respond to all of this if sin really is such an enemy to our relationship with god working what hope is there for any of us or what does the book of joshua have to teach us have a look at that first column on your sheet again where is the hope in this book it's in the lord isn't it let me read to you again from chapter 21 the lord gave israel all the land he had sworn to give to their forefathers they took possession of it and settled there the lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their forefathers not one of their enemies withstood them the lord handed all their enemies over to them not one of all the lord's good promises to the house of israel failed everyone was fulfilled where is the hope in this book it's not in joshua or the great armies of israel it's in the lord ultimately the only hope for israel the only hope for us the only hope for a world gone wrong is the mercy and the love and the power of god it's not the way we often think about it though is it uh the uh theologian whose name i always have trouble pronouncing i think it's reinhold niebuhr he once said no amount of contrary evidence seems to disturb humanity's good opinion of itself and it's true isn't it the 20th century was meant to be the great century of evolutionary optimism i don't know if you know that but when the the 19th century sort of

[24 : 45] turned into the into the 20th century there was this great expectation that things are getting better people are evolving and becoming better people the world is getting better look at our technology our ability to solve problems like we've never done before the human race has never looked more civilized that was a propaganda coming down through the universities and seeping into popular culture at the beginning of the last century and uh we grew up this with this didn't we we have we have computers we have reason we have whatever it is we don't need god anymore to have eden but what did the 20th century in reality to reveal more death more carnage more greed more waste more evil than the world had ever seen before see technology didn't deal with our sin it just made us more sophisticated at how we did it see what joshua in fact the whole bible teaches us is that we're not part of the solution apart from god we're actually and this offends us but it's true we're actually part of the problem i think it's a great tragedy when the church starts to imitate the world in this way when it starts to think that the way to bring about eden this glorious existence is perhaps through i don't know law reform land care schemes recycling now these are all great things they help put limits on certain social evils don't they they're good but they don't deal with the core problem do they that is hearts that are turned away from their creator see god was teaching israel he teaches us that the only hope for a world gone wrong is him well what is the solution then what what do we do how do we respond to this well by repenting by turning back to god by turning away from sin i went to see a really great film the other night it's a little bit depressing i guess but there are glimmers of hope towards the end it's a film called uh traffic some of you may have seen it it's about the whole drug trade thing obviously from an american point of view that's where it's set and the the most uh amazing thing about it is that it looks at the the drug problem from so many different angles from the uh corrupt armies in in south america who who are just basically uh uh perpetuating uh these social evils to the the drug barons that the huge money uh makers who are bringing into the country into the u.s and it goes uh to the street where an actual victim or or someone who's addicted to drugs you see their life and and their life slowly deteriorating and the the chief character

there the michael douglas character he's high up in in the government he's a a drug reform guy and he gets to hang out with the president things like that he gets millions of dollars or the department does he flies around in jets to solve this problem to throw money at this problem the irony in the film is that his daughter is actually a drug addict and he hardly knows it he hardly knows his daughter because he's he's so busy but there's this sense of futility that they've got the american government has all this money to throw at it and yet all these barons have even more money and more arms that it can just swamp and it seems to be this never ending cycle and you get really depressed watching this film but at the end his daughter goes into rehab the equivalent of aa which many of you will know was started by christians and they're meeting in this this dusty little church hall sort of your average sort of anglican hall looking kind of place with an old dusty uh pulpit thing with crosses on it but people's lives that's where

people's lives are being changed where they're learning to trust and find security in god rather than in these chemicals that's where the real action is happening it's quite striking that contrast this huge government saying we'll solve the problem and just one person at a time it's just a trickle their lives being transformed i saw that as a as a picture of what happens when when one person repents when one person realizes that we are part of the problem and they turn away from their sin our failed attempts to have eden apart from god and turn back to him in faith that's why it says in 2 corinthians 5 17 if anyone is in christ there is new creation that's why jesus says in luke 15 7 that there is great rejoicing in heaven when one sinner turns back to god and what do we expect to find when we approach god in this way someone who begrudgingly accepts us but still views us as a little bit sus no the open arms of the father who not only forgives us but showers upon us blessing after blessing see what god was teaching israel through giving them the land and then through frustrating their life in the land when they turn their backs on him was this life in the land only works when we are living as god created us to live in complete dependence upon him and his grace that's what adam and eve were called to do in eden but they doubted god really could be god for them that's what israel were called to do in canaan but they doubted that what god held out to them was enough they went looking in other places and these events the whole of the old testament was teaching god's people the whole world that if not for god and his gracious initiative to save and bless us the human race could never get back to the eden that they so desperately yearn for the initiative that would ultimately come through the death and resurrection of the one who came along and said these words come to me all you who are weary and burdened and i will give you rest is that word again take my yoke upon you and learn from me for i am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light it's two sure things in life but one sure way to find life put your trust in the god who keeps his promises who gave israel rest in the land who gives us rest in christ now when we are forgiven in him and an even more complete way in the future in the new heavens and the new earth where we will rest forever with our god as he intended from creation i want us to finish now by praying together and i'm going to uh give you some ideas for how you can respond to this passage in prayer i'll just leave a pause after each one so let's let's bow our heads in prayer as we respond to god's love his word to us tonight let's pray we want to thank you god for giving us complete rest for giving us every spiritual blessing in christ father we want to repent we want to turn away from our betrayal our devaluing of our unfaithfulness to that gift to that calling we think about the ways we've done that now father we pray that as we look forward to the complete realization of that rest in the new heaven and the new earth that you'd help us to get rid of all the things in our lives which are inconsistent with our new life in christ and we think of those things now we hand them to god and father by the power of your spirit we ask that you would work in our lives so that we might fix our eyes on jesus as we run the race that he has set out for us and father we pray to you trusting in your faithfulness and we pray in jesus name amen when we pray to you trusting in tp again take this period and we like to pray in prayer thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you