

The God Who Keeps His Promises

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[0 : 0 0] and he's making his final speech to the people of God. And before he dies, before he, as he says, goes the way of all the earth, he wants to remind Israel, he wants to remind the people of God where their true confidence should lie.

We read from verse 1, A long time afterwards, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, Joshua was old and well advanced in years. He summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, I am now old and well advanced in years.

So this is the context to the passage that we're looking at this morning. Before he dies, Joshua wants to pass on to the people of God some essential truth for living confidently for him in a world where they're surrounded by people and by nations living in rebellion against God.

They are in the land, they are settled. And they are truths that are essential for us today as God's people to be confident believers in the Lord, living in a culture that's hostile to Jesus Christ and to his kingdom.

And if we look at verse 3, we see our first point this morning as we think about confidence in God our Saviour. I wonder this morning what you would say would be your source of confidence in life.

[1 : 2 0] Many people today look for different things in life for confidence. Some people find confidence in physical appearance, in what we look like or the clothes that we wear or the car that we drive.

Other people, confidence is found in the bank balance and in financial security and stability and material possessions and everything that comes along with that. For many other people, confidence is found in friends and family and loved ones and the people around us.

But the problem with looking to all of these things for our confidence in life is that ultimately none of them endure. Money does nothing for us in the face of sickness, grief and pain.

People change, people move, people leave us. The Bible points us to a source of confidence outside of ourselves and outside of our circumstances to a source of confidence that will never fail us or never let us down.

That's what we see here in Joshua chapter 23. We read in verse 3, Joshua says to the people, First of all, you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake.

[2 : 3 1] For it is the Lord your God who has fought for you. So right at the end of his life, Joshua as the leader of God's people is emphasizing first and foremost that he is not the hero.

He is not the reason for Israel's success and their victories throughout the book of Joshua. And this is really important right at the beginning because he has been the leader of God's people since the time of Moses.

And under his leadership, the people have experienced victory after victory and success after success. They have finally come to live in the land that God has promised them.

God has given them the rest they have been longing for. And so in many ways, the chapter we read is a high point in Israel's history. After a long time in slavery in Egypt and wandering around in the wilderness, they are finally in the land that God has promised them.

And so at this point in their history, it would be easy for them to turn Joshua into the hero. It would be easy to attribute all their success and victories to him. But verse 3 makes so clear to us, and the point reiterated time and time again in this speech, is that God is the hero in Joshua.

[3 : 4 6] God is the one who brings the victory. And so by implication, Joshua and the people are not the hero. Joshua is saying, I don't want you people to get the wrong idea.

I don't want you to think that your success has been because of your own strength or your own courage or because of my leadership. And when you look back through the books, all of the

victories that God's people experienced in crossing the Jordan, it's God who dried it up. God who allowed his people to cross. Excuse me. In the battle against the city of Jericho, it's God who brings the walls down.

The people march and blow their trumpets, but it's God who brings the victory. Even his name, Joshua, means the Lord saves. And so Joshua begins his speech by saying to the people, it is the Lord who has fought for you.

The expression is repeated again in verse 10. It's the Lord your God who has fought for you. And the fact that God fights for his people is a key theme in the book of Joshua.

[4 : 52] And so God's people should have confidence in God, not only because of what God has done and the victories they have experienced in the past, but looking forward to what God will do. He says this in verse 5.

There are enemies that remain in the land. He says that the Lord your God will push them back before you. He will drive them out of your sight and you shall possess their land just as the Lord your God promised you.

So Joshua's first concern in his farewell address is that he doesn't want the people to be proud or arrogant or think that they've earned this rest by their own strength. And when we take a step back from the book of Joshua, we see throughout the whole Bible that God is always the hero in the story of salvation.

God is the main character in redemption. The Lord who acts on behalf of people is a central biblical truth. It's a truth that is at the heart of our faith today.

The gospel is not about what we've done for God. The gospel is a message about what God has done for us. About God acting on behalf of his people through Jesus.

[6 : 01] So when our faith feels weak, when we maybe feel distant from God, when we're weighed down by the pressures of life, where we're struggling with doubt or discouragement or burdens, in all of the everyday struggles against sin and weakness and suffering, the gospel message reminds us, first and foremost, that God is for us.

God fights for his people. God acts on his people's behalf. The Lord God, Yahweh, is a God who fights for his people. And as we think about confidence and encouragement in the Christian life, this has to be our foundation.

The Lord God fights for his people. So if you're a Christian this morning, you know that Jesus Christ has secured the victory for you, on your behalf. He has conquered sin and death.

He has made it possible for deeply flawed, sinful individuals to come to a holy and perfect and righteous God and call him our Father. He has given us such confidence.

Paul echoes this in Romans chapter 8. He says there, if God is for us, who can be against us? If God is for us, who can be against us?

[7 : 19] See, Christian faith today is not wishful thinking. It's not blind optimism in the future. Faith is complete and utter confidence in this God who fights for his people, the God who secures the victory for his believers.

Paul goes on and says, who shall separate us then from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. But listen to his confidence. No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am sure, I am certain, that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If that's not a source of confidence for us today, I don't know what is. Later this evening, over in St. Columba's Free Church in Edinburgh, we're going to be celebrating the Lord's Supper together.

[8 : 33] And the Lord's Supper is a time where we stop and we remember and we reflect on everything that Jesus has secured for us on our behalf. In the Lord's Supper, we recognize that it's something we could never do for ourselves.

The Lord's Supper points us to the incredible reality of Christ's death and everything he accomplished for us. And in the eating and the drinking together, we are proclaiming, we are mindful that nothing can separate us from his love.

Nobody can snatch us from his hand. No crisis in life can come between you and the Son of God who loves you and gave himself for you. In the Gospel, God is for us.

And so there's a huge amount of encouragement in this first part of Joshua's speech in the biblical truth that God acts on his people's behalf. God is the one who fights for his people. So there's encouragement, but there's also challenge because God knows that as human beings we are so easily forgetful.

We so easily slide into complacency and spiritual amnesia. We see this in the experience of God's people. Not long after Joshua, we come to the book of Judges and there's cycles and cycles of forgetfulness.

[9 : 49] They forget what God has done for them. They forget the salvation he has given them. And they turn aside to the idols and gods of the nations around them. We need to be mindful that it is God who gives us the victory.

God is the one in whom our confidence is placed. David in Psalm 30 says, In times of prosperity, in times of rest, when things are going well, we are so prone to forget the God who loves us.

But the Bible reminds us it is God who brings the victory. God who turns hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. And so as we reflect on being a church here in Livingston or in Edinburgh, wherever God has placed us, we are so mindful as we think about evangelism, as we think about growth and the kingdom of God.

We can so easily be frustrated when we don't see people coming. When we don't see people being converted. When we don't see people coming to faith. We have to remind ourselves that we are his instruments and his tools as his people.

But unless the Lord builds the house, the labourers labour in vain. Paul in the New Testament echoes this and says, I planted, Apollos watered, but it is God who gives the growth.

[11 : 10] So where is our confidence placed this morning as God's people here in Livingston? First point in Joshua's final speech. Remember that God is the hero who fights for his people.

God is the one who gives the victory. Secondly this morning, I want to think about the people who cling to their God. Look at verse 6 to verse 8. Therefore, he says, 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, in order that you may not mix with the 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. So in other words, if the first point was all about what God has done for his people, the second point this morning is how his people should respond and live in light of that.

One of the key themes running through the book of Joshua is the importance of obedience. Of obedience to what God has done and what God has said. And I wonder this morning what the word obedience makes you think of.

For many people today in our world, I think it gives them an image of quite a negative sense. People think that obedience makes God sound like an oppressive slave driver or a harsh and distant taskmaster.

[12 : 35] But obedience for us here in Joshua 23 is presented as a response of love. A response of gratitude. When Joshua says to the people to cling to the Lord their God in verse 8, the word that is used is actually first used all the way back in Genesis for the intimate bond between a husband and a wife.

It's a word that speaks of permanence. Isaiah uses the same word to describe metal that has been welded together in Isaiah 41. Israel is pictured in the Bible as the Lord's bride.

The one to whom he is married. And so Joshua urges the people to live faithfully for God. Obeying what he has said. Remaining loyal to him in the midst of unbelieving nations.

And so he does this in the context of love. Because in a marriage a husband and a wife give everything to one another. They don't just give each other one day a week.

Lip service. A random acknowledgement that they actually exist sometimes. A husband and a wife give everything to one another. So how do people respond to what God has done for them and to what God has said in his word and his law is really important.

[13 : 49] And the language that the chapter uses reflects the reality that this is hard. That this is a battle for God's people. It says, Be very strong to keep and do all that is written in the law.

Turning aside from it neither to the right nor to the left. Obedience is something that requires strength. Be very strong, Joshua says. Because it can be hard.

It can be hard to live faithfully for God in the midst of people and nations and countries that have rebelled against him. We said in the first point that one of the greatest challenges to us as the people of God is the problem of spiritual forgetfulness.

God knows that his people are forgetful. He knows his people are prone to turn aside off the path. One of the main problems we see for Israel as the story of the Bible unfolds is not so much aggressive foreign nations, it's internal.

Their problems come from themselves. The fact that they forget and turn away from God, their Saviour. And when we read that sometimes we think how on earth can these people be so forgetful?

[14:58] How can they be so quick to leave the God who has loved them and redeemed them, brought them from Egypt and given them this land? Sinclair Ferguson says that forgetfulness is the enemy of faith for us today as well.

He says failure to deal with the presence of sin in our lives can so often be traced back to spiritual amnesia, forgetting our new, true, real identity.

He says as a believer you are someone who has been delivered from the dominion of sin and who is therefore free and motivated to fight against sin in your heart. You must know, you must rest in, think through, and act upon that new identity.

you are in Christ. In other words, first and foremost, we need to remind ourselves as God's people every day that our salvation is not a result of our own power or our own strength, our own ability to stay on the path.

Just like the people of God in Joshua's context, we need to remember that God acts on behalf of his people and that we live in light of that, in response to that. But Joshua does make really clear the dangers of compromising.

[16:07] He says, if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and if you 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.

They shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes until you perish from this good ground the Lord your God has given you.

There's a kind of contrast presented for us in these verses. The word cling appears again in verse 12. There's a choice laid before the people of God. Who are you going to cling to? Who are you going to serve?

Who are you going to live for? The God who has given you this great victory are the world and the nations and the people around you and all the temptations that they bring.

And the next chapter, Joshua goes on to emphasize this. He says, Who will you serve? Who will you serve today, O Israel? As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

[17:10] So we're called to be a people who cling to our God, to give Him our loyalty and our allegiance, to hold fast to Him like a husband to a wife.

And verse 11 ties together these two themes for us, the love and obedience. Joshua says, Be very careful to love the Lord your God. Dale Ralph Davis, Old Testament scholar, commenting on this passage, he says, It's not simply a question of loving the law, but of loving the law giver.

If people love the law giver, they will seek to do what he wants, to listen to His words. Jesus, when He's asked to sum up the law in the New Testament, He says, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment. A second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

So there's a deep connection between obeying God and loving God. He that loves me keeps my commands. So we look to the God who fights for His people who acts on their behalf, the people who cling to their God to love Him and obey Him in a world of chaos.

[18:36] Thirdly, and finally, in Joshua, we see the promises that never fail. The promises that never fail. Look at verse 14. And now, as 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 the Lord your God promised concerning you.

All have come to pass. Not one of them has failed. The book of Joshua presents God as the God who makes and keeps promises.

He's a God who is utterly faithful to every word that He has said. God is a God who is absolutely committed to His people and to what He has promised them, to the fact that He will do what He has said.

Very few things today can be as damaging to a relationship and to our confidence in another person as a broken promise, as someone who goes back on their word. When someone breaks a promise, it can have a devastating effect on trust.

But God is a God who is absolutely faithful. Back in Genesis, God made a threefold promise to a man called Abraham. He promised him a land, a home in which to live.

[19 : 55] He promised him a people, a family, numerous descendants and He promised him a blessing through a new relationship with God. And now here at the end of the book of Joshua, Joshua is reflecting on God and how God has kept these promises.

God has faithfully rescued His people from slavery in Egypt. He's taken them into this new home. He's defeated their enemies. He's given them rest. What had been a man and a small family has become a large nation.

And so Joshua is reminding the people as they seek to live confidently for Him in this world that God is absolutely faithful to His promises. And sometimes all we can do as Christians is come back to God's promises.

When we hear a devastating diagnosis, when we face the death of a loved one, when we're struggling with grief and pain and sickness, when we're going through all the battles of life, one thing we can do as Christians is come back to God's promises.

We can come back to the God who is absolutely faithful even when our faith is at its weakest. A God who is constant. A God who does not change. His word is full of His promises.

[21 : 11] He promises us in John chapter 10 that our salvation is secure. He promises in James to give us wisdom when we ask. He promises to always provide us with a way out of temptation.

He promises to finish the good work He has started in us. Paul says no matter how many promises God has made they are yes in Christ. It is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us. He set His seal of ownership on us and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come. Once again our faith is not wishful thinking.

Our faith is in the one who has guaranteed our deposit, our inheritance. And the amazing thing today as Christians is that we can cling to Jesus Christ because He is clinging to us.

He has set His seal of ownership on us. He is absolutely committed to you as His people. Hebrews 13 verse 6 the Lord says I will never leave you nor forsake you.

[22 : 20] So we can say with confidence the Lord is my helper I will not fear what can man do to me. So as we close this morning the book of Joshua reminds us that God is the faithful promise keeping God.

He is someone who you can take at His word. May He enable us to cling to Him all the more this week to ground ourselves in His word and in His promises and to love Him and live for Him and obey Him in all that we do.

Let's pray together. Lord God our Savior our Redeemer our Father we thank You for Your Word we thank You for Your promises we thank You Lord God that we can come to Your Word we can come to Your promises and we can have absolute faith and certainty that You are a God who is faithful to Your people.

Father we pray that You would in our hearts this morning show us our sins show us our weakness show us our faults show us where we are turning aside and Father help us to cling to Jesus help us to come to You to run to Your feet to acknowledge before You our need for You and Father we pray that we would know how loved we are in the Gospel we thank You so much Father that the Gospel is a message first and foremost of what You have done what You have secured for Your people on our behalf Father help us not to trust in ourselves help us not to put our confidence in ourselves or in the people around us but in You our God and our Saviour so Father we pray that You'd help us this week in all that we do to place our confidence and our trust in You in Jesus name we pray this Amen we're going to close our time of worship together by singing

Psalms 46 Psalm 46 from the Sing Psalms and that's on page 60 Psalm 46 we're going to sing from verse 7 to the end of the Psalm a wonderful Psalm that reflects our confidence in God the Lord Almighty is with us to strengthen and sustain for Jacob's God our strong defence and fortress will

remain we'll sing from verse 7 to the end of the Psalm the tune is Stroudwater and we'll stand together and sing