

God Keeps His Promises

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 January 2023

[0 : 00] Well, can we turn back to our reading in Joshua chapter 23. Looking at this chapter this evening, we're going to think of the theme of how God keeps his promises and how we see that with Joshua here in this chapter.

When you read through the scriptures, you constantly encounter the promises of God. And if you were to have a wee challenge this evening, how many of the promises of God can you think of in scripture?

If you were to start writing them down, you would probably come across a number of ones that just spring to mind instantly. But the more you go on and the more you go through scripture, the more you begin to see just how many promises there are.

You think of the promises that maybe stand out in the early parts of the scriptures, the covenant with Abraham, how God promised that he would have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore.

You have God's promise to Noah after the flood when he gave the sign of the rainbow, how never again he would destroy the world in that way.

[1 : 15] You have promises that a word of God to many of his people down through the generations promises that he says, I will never leave you or forsake you.

Promise he gave to Joshua, as we'll see. He promises to lead his people. He promises us a savior. He promises us the day of the resurrection.

He promises us that the Lord Jesus Christ will come again. And it goes on. So you start listing the promises of God and you see just how many they are.

And people have estimated by looking at scripture just how many thousands of promises they have. If you start writing them on a little bit of paper, you would soon run out.

Even if you had an A4 jotter, you would run out of paper when you start noting down just how many promises there are. So we're constantly hearing the promises of God as we are reading through the scriptures.

[2 : 14] And in 2 Corinthians 1, verse 20, we are told this, all the promises of God find their yes in him. That is, in Christ Jesus.

All the promises of God find their yes in him. They're all fulfilled in him. So when you think of the promises of God and how many they are, it's good to remind ourselves of how faithful God is to us through all of his promises.

And it's good to remind ourselves, whether it's in our own experiences of how we have known God's promises to us, or in the experiences of others, how we hear or see of God's promises, helping and keeping people through so many different situations.

We think of even congregational fellowships like we have, and times when we meet together, we speak together of the things of God and what he has done for us, and how encouraged we are to hear of God's promises shown to others and then remind ourselves he's been faithful to us too.

But in some ways, here we are meeting with Joshua in this chapter. And here he is, and he's speaking to the people of Israel, especially speaking to the leaders of Israel at this point, but a message that would go out to all the people.

[3 : 40] And it's a message of God's faithfulness to him. And how, as he is looking back, he is able to see every promise of God has been kept.

Never has the Lord failed him. We see it here in verse 14, where it says there, God keeps his promises.

And some of the promises he has given have been already fulfilled. Some of his promises are still ongoing, and some of his promises are still to come.

But whether it takes a short time or a long time, God keeps every one of the promises he makes.

And we see here Joshua is speaking as an old man.

His time on earth is coming to a conclusion. But having led the children of Israel through so much, having brought them in to the promised land, having seen the rewards of coming into the promised land, his longing now, as he looks at the people around him, is that they will go on in the faith, go on leaning and looking to the promises of God.

[5 : 21] And that's his concern, as we see in this chapter. He is speaking to the people here, warning them against complacency. He's saying, don't forget the promises of God.

Don't forget how faithful God has been. Don't forget what he has said in his word. Neither forget the blessings that he has spoken about, and neither forget the judgments which he has spoken about as well.

Because all of these things, they put demands on you. And so it is with ourselves today as well. That as we hear the promises of God, we have the promises of his blessings, but the warning too of the promise of his judgment when we disobey his word.

Fear the Lord, he's saying. Keep looking to him. But if you turn away, you will suffer the consequences. We often speak today in terms of a generation lost to the church.

And there is truth in that statement. We look around and what we see around ourselves is there are people, and especially maybe we see it in a certain generation, are people who do not fear the Lord, who have been turned away or who have turned away from God through the appeal of this world.

[6 : 50] And we think to ourselves how quickly things change. And when you look at the experience of Joshua, there's a reminder to us of this very thing.

Because as we're reading here, we're reading of a generation who were trusting the Lord and who were committed and looking to him and leaning on him.

And here as Joshua speaks, he is speaking into that situation. But all you have to do is turn forward into the book of Judges, in chapter 2.

We're going to read some verses from there. Just the next book, the book of Judges, chapter 2.

And you read there of the death of Joshua at verse 6.

And listen to what it says. When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived.

[7 : 54] Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel. And Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years.

And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-Heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gash.

And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them, who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.

You see just how quickly it changed. Joshua there in chapter 23, speaking to a people who were trusting in the Lord.

And then another generation, and they arise, and they've got no word for what the Lord has done for them. And in such a short space of time, you see how quickly it changed.

[8 : 59] When we look in our own history, and we see our own nation, even our own islands, and we think of it like that, how quickly things have changed. And in many ways, that can leave us feeling dismayed.

But it should also leave us feeling a bit of hope. That just as things can change so quickly downwards, so the Lord can so quickly change things in the opposite direction as well.

And that is what Joshua is getting at here in this chapter. Even as he's warning them of what is to come, he is warning them to keep their focus on the Lord.

And so I want us to take these two things from this passage this evening. That the way that we see how God keeps his promises, it's to think of keeping looking to God and keeping leaning on God.

So looking to God first. What was the situation at the time that Joshua speaks to the people here? Well, verse one makes it clear for us the kind of situation it was.

[10 : 08] A long time afterwards, when the Lord had given rest, to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, they had been given rest. God had given them rest.

It was a time of peace. Joshua and the children of Israel here were enjoying a time of peace. God had given them rest from all the enemies around them.

And they had come in to the promised land. They were enjoying all that this land had to offer them. They had been blessed in seeing God's promise of this land fulfilled.

But is this a good thing when it comes to going on in faith? Is the best environment to grow in your faith?

Is the best environment to grow in your faith days of peace? In some ways, we would say yes. Because here we see they're enjoying this peace.

[11:12] They're enjoying the promises of God, reward of this land to them. But there's also a danger. And that is what Joshua is seeing here in his old age.

You read that just as he was rest in the land, Joshua was old and well advanced in years. Joshua had seen so much to this point.

He had seen so much through his life. And now he's looking around and he's seeing the people around him. And there's a sense here that he's sensing the danger of what is beginning to happen in their lives.

He sees some things beginning to happen in their lives and he doesn't like it. So like a good leader, he sees and he feels his duty as a leader of the people to point this out to them.

He's warning the leaders of Israel here to be on their guard for this so they can warn the people who they are in charge of. And this is him before he departs.

[12:22] He wants to make sure that he leaves them on a good footing. And what is the danger that he sees? Well, as they have come in to the promised land, there is still the remnant of nations around them.

Nations who have their people there and nations who have their gods there. And the danger that Joshua is seeing is that the people are starting to look.

They are starting to look at what is around them. It's so similar to the Garden of Eden once again almost. They're in the promised land. They've been given everything they need for provided by God.

Everything they need is there. But they look beyond that. And they look to what God has told them not to do. Not to go and mix with the other nations.

Not to marry into the other nations because this is going to bring a judgment on you. But they begin to look. It's in our nature, through our fallen nature, through our sin, to start looking at what we can't have or what we shouldn't have.

[13:37] A danger that still exists to this day. So Joshua is afraid the people are maybe taking God's word for granted. Taking his blessings for granted.

And they're beginning to let their eyes wander in different directions. And they're becoming this kind of complacent people. A little like what we looked at last week with the church in Laodicea.

They were lukewarm. They weren't hot. They weren't cold. They were lukewarm. They're just stale. And it's in that kind of situation that things begin to go wrong.

So here are the people of Joshua's day. They're becoming lukewarm. They're starting to look elsewhere. And this time of peace is not being good to them.

They're losing their edge. You think of it in this way. What happens to an army in a time of peace? They can become fat and lazy, ill-equipped.

[14:39] They lose their edge. They're not ready for when a conflict, for when a war arises, unless they've kept themselves in shape, unless they've kept themselves constantly in training.

And think of it in a Christian perspective. How do we use our times of peace that we have enjoyed or maybe even are enjoying just now in some ways? Do we become lacy?

Do we become lukewarm? Do we lose our edge? Do we lose our focus and start looking in the wrong places instead of looking to and trusting in God?

Well, Joshua here is warning the people to keep themselves in training, to keep themselves in shape, looking to God and his promises and trusting in him.

He says in verse six, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the book of Moses, or the law of Moses, turning aside from it, neither to the right hand nor to the left.

[15:46] Don't start looking in different directions. He's saying, keep your focus on God. How often in the Bible do you read a verse that says, blessed are you in peace for your faith will grow.

Can you find that verse in the Bible that says that? It's the opposite, isn't it? It's the very opposite that's true in the scriptures.

It's not blessed are you in times of peace for your faith grows, but blessed are you in times of persecution. Blessed are you in adversity, then your faith grows.

Matthew 5, verse 11, blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you. And other all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven.

Blessed are you when you're persecuted. James 1, verse 2, counted all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

[16 : 52] Again, it's not in peace, it's in trials. 1 Peter 1, which we've been looking at recently, says there, in this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.

So the tested genuineness of your faith. So it goes on, more precious than gold. It's in the testing of your faith. That's what keeps us looking to Jesus.

So a time of peace is a time to keep ourselves well trained, on our guard, not complacent, and making sure we're not looking beyond what we should be, but looking always to the Lord.

We do this by looking to the promises of God, to his word, and how he faithfully keeps, and will keep each one, the blessings and the curses.

We should be standing convinced and challenged by them. So we look to God. The next thing we see, the second thing we see here is this leaning on God.

[18 : 01] So you think of the situation here of Joshua when the people there have been devoted to God. Well, think of our own islands here. If everyone in our islands became a Christian, the work of the church is done, would there still be a need for the church?

I don't mean in the sense of the church as the people or the bride of Christ, but the church in the sense as it functions. Would we still need the church?

Can we not just close the doors of our churches? If everyone's a Christian, why do we need it?

Well, if we think the sole purpose of the church is evangelism or reaching out to the lost, then we would say, yes, that could be true.

But we would be wrong because that is not the case. Part of our work is reaching out to the lost. In many ways, it's not the main part because the main part of the church is to worship God and to praise his name.

When you look at verse 1 to verse 5 here, Joshua speaks of the peace they have and the blessings that God has given them and the protection he will show them.

[19 : 32] But he doesn't say job done. He doesn't say that's it. We're complete. We're finished.

What he says in verse 6, therefore, be very strong to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses.

The people are still leaning upon God. The main purpose of the church, the people of God, is to be together worshipping him, acknowledging our dependence upon him.

Just like the shorter catechism says, man's chief end, our first great end, is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Joshua could have looked around and seen a people who had peace and were enjoying the blessings of God and may be happy to leave it at that. But he sees coming to faith is not the end point.

It's just the beginning. We need to go on in the strength of the Lord. And as Joshua looks around, he's concerned that people are starting to lose sight of this.

[20 : 44] No faith can be strong if it's not growing. Just as Jesus makes clear for us in John 15, he says, I am the vine, you are the branches.

We only bear fruit through him. So we are starting to come away from him we will fade. We will lose our fruit bearing capacity.

We are always leaning on him. So Joshua here is speaking through experience. And once again you see in the history of the nation of Israel that Joshua was right to be concerned.

And you see that they didn't heed the warnings. They drifted away from God. And is that a concern for the church today? Of course it is.

And it always has to be a concern. We always have to ask is our commitment what it should be?

And what does our commitment look like in the light of God's promises?

[21 : 48] The promises of blessing and the promises of judgment. commitment. Well what does the idea of commitment look like to the Lord Jesus Christ? How does he describe how our commitment

should be?

Again there's maybe many places we could look but in Matthew 10 verse 37 he says whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. What kind of commitment is the Lord looking for there? He's telling us so clearly that if he's not our main purpose in life is to worship him then we are losing focus.

We are not leaning on him. We are not worthy of him. He speaks of the ultimate expression of love and his willingness to bear his cross and he asks of us to take up our cross and follow him.

Again it speaks of this burden this weight this persecution this suffering whatever it is but that we are to take it up and follow him.

[23 : 05] So how do we describe our commitment to him? Are we all in? Is our heart fully committed to him? What does Joshua leave them with as he is about to depart?

While he leaves with them the very thing that has kept them going. He has known every promise of God fulfilled. Verse 14 that's what he is saying.

And now I am about to go the way of all the earth and you know in your hearts and souls all of you that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you.

Not one thing of God has failed. Isn't it encouraging to hear Joshua speak in this way? It's like we're entering into him sharing a word of testimony, a word of encouragement to us as God's people.

And he's encouraging just as he was the people then ourselves today to remind ourselves again and again that every promise of God is yes in Christ Jesus.

[24 : 19] And to keep our focus on leaning on these promises. Verse 6 sums up the way he has lived his life. Therefore be very strong to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses.

Where have you heard this before? At the very outset of Joshua in chapter 1 when Joshua was called to lead the children of Israel.

What was he told? In chapter 1 verse 7 it says only be strong and very courageous being careful to do according to all that 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. His experience means at the start that he has enjoyed through all his years.

It's a very testimony that he is giving to his people as his time on earth comes to an end. The words are almost identical. And we can take these words for ourselves today as well.

[25 : 31] Joshua is saying I am about to go but what he says is not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God has promised concerning you.

Therefore he says in verse 6 be very strong to keep and 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.

Don't stop looking to God and don't stop leaning on God. So that is what he is saying to us too.

To look at the promises of God. To see how faithful he is in having kept them, keeping them and he will keep them. They bring us protection.

They bring us closer to him because they are all secure in Christ. Joshua speaks as one who has known it throughout all his days and may we be enabled to hold fast to the same promises with that same attitude, being strong, keeping all that the word of God has commanded, not turning to the left nor to the right, looking to and leaning upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

[27 : 03] May God bless these thoughts to us. We're going to conclude by singing theppone.