

Under your word is life

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: 08 November 2015

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 0 0] in your Bibles to Joshua. So Joshua is after Deuteronomy. It's the sixth book in the Bible, the Old Testament. And we're going to do the first reading here, and then we're going to be turning to Hebrews. But we're going to be coming back to Joshua for the best part of this evening.

So we're going to take our reading from Joshua, beginning at chapter 1, and reading the first nine verses. We'll make reference to the other nine up to 18 afterwards, but we'll read the first nine to begin with. Now hear God's Word, Joshua chapter 1, beginning at verse 1.

After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, Moses, my servant, is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, and to the lands that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.

Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, and all the land of the Hittites to the great sea towards the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life, just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous.

For you shall cause his people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to 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.

[2 : 1 2] Wherever you go, this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do all according to that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you?

Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened. Do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. There's a few verses in Hebrews I'd like us to turn to, so if we could just turn there together. I'm going to be picking up in Hebrews chapter 13. So Hebrews comes just before James.

So Hebrews chapter 13, and we'll pick it up at verse 5, and we'll read through to verse 9. The call of God's word is this, to verse 5, keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have. For he has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you.

So we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods which have not benefited those devoted to them. Amen.

Amen. Well, we'll come back to that together. Well, if you'd like to make your way back to Joshua chapter 1, and for those who are doing it, for those who don't have our Bibles already there, let me just say where we are from last week.

[4 : 3 8] We decided to begin a new series called Your Word is Life, taken from Deuteronomy, where God, through Moses, pronounces to his people that his word is life. This is kind of repeated by Jesus in many ways when he is tempted by Satan, by saying to Satan that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Bonhoeffer said that it is a deceitful thing to even think that you can live by food and water alone. It's actually a lie to think that anybody can actually live on physical food and water. Man cannot live on that alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Life is more than the body simply operating. And so last week, we understood what it was for the Word of God to dwell richly in us, not to stay on the surface, not to stay on the surface of our mind or on the surface of our heart, but to dwell richly in

us. And when this happens, it is both clear and measurable.

There is a clear difference between the Word of God penetrating your heart and what comes out of your heart. It's measurable compared to when the Word of God simply sits on the surface of your life.

And when the Word of God sits on the surface of your life, you understand a little, may not understand it all, but it doesn't have like it had this morning, where you've got that deep, deep move of God, and the Word does the work. And so this evening, the title of the message, Under Your Word is Life, is let the Word do the work. The world is not ours to save. We cannot save it with our missions.

We cannot save it with our endeavors. We cannot save it with our plans and purposes. Rather, let God do His work. And the way that He does His work through His people is by His people letting the Word do the work.

Now, the spiritual priority to all of this is that we may be a faithful people, that we may be a biblical people, that we may be a people that are kingdom people, that we can be defined and measured as kingdom people. But of course, kingdom people need to live in kingdom ways. And what we see here in the life of Joshua and the mission that he has given, and also for it to be repeated in Hebrews, teaches us that the lesson is an important lesson. I mean, it was all of Scripture is important. But whenever a lesson is repeated, in other words, it's reaffirmed in the New Testament, it's obviously drawing a particular attention to something that we may have missed or that we may not have seen with great clarity, or that we may have to look at again now that we're on this side of a resurrected Messiah.

[8 : 08] Remember, the Bible was always understood one way, pre-Jesus, okay, pre-Messiah, pre-life, death, and resurrection of the Christ. And then the Bible takes on a whole new meaning, or rather, it's driving towards that meaning of that now everything has to be seen and interpreted through Christ's life, death, and resurrection. So the writer to the Hebrews is writing his letter in the context of Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but he wants us to look back at something in Joshua. And the thing that he draws our attention to is that God will never leave us or forsake us. And so both Joshua and us seem to be living in the same reality. But what is that reality?

And it's this, that all of us, then then, and us now, are living between two worlds. We are living between two worlds. For Joshua, it was how they have come out of Egypt, they have wandered for a very long time, but they have not yet entered into the promised land. They've not yet got there. And so they are living between two realities. They're living between two worlds. The world of Egypt, where they were slaves and in bondage, and the place where they will experience wonderful freedom, but not without battle. Wonderful, you know, a land flowing with milk and honey. And so they're in this tension of living between what was promised, but not yet occurred, but not in the old Egypt either. And for the Christian, it is exactly the same. We live between two worlds. We live in the world as it is, but we're on God's mission and purpose and plan, and what the world will actually be in the end. Remember, God's will on earth is being done as it is in heaven. Okay? There is a new world coming. And so we too, just like the people in

Joshua's day, are living between two realities. And so how do we live in a time where it's not quite as bad as what it was, you know, pre-conversion, you know, that old world, that old life, it's not quite as bad then, but it's not nowhere near as good as what it will be when God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's the day that we're hoping and longing for. And so everybody here is living between two worlds. And that bit in the middle, for Joshua, it was a journey. For us, it's not so much a journey as it is a mission. In fact, for Joshua, it was a mission. It may look as though they're moving from Egypt to the promised land and it's taking a very long time, but they had a mission to fulfill. God was not telling them to move into this land for any old reason.

He was telling them to move into the land to fulfill the plans and purposes that God had. So go and fulfill the mission. Well, in the same way, Christians are not on a journey because as we're reading God's word, God's will on earth is being done as it is in heaven. We're not journeying towards it. It is journeying towards us. So as we've looked at this before, if you've got this idea in your head that the Christian life is all about serving God and living for God in order to go somewhere, you're going to have a sharp surprise when God brings you right back to where he wants you, here. Okay. God's will on earth is being done as it is in heaven. And the way God's will on earth gets done as it is in heaven is by us fulfilling the mission that God has for us. So we live between two worlds, the world

that is, that's not as bad as what it was in terms for us who believe, and the world that is to come. God is making this world better. So we're not on a journey waiting to escape. We're not on a journey getting ready to die and ready to leave.

Okay. We're on a mission. Okay. Waiting for God to make this place beautiful once again. That's the point. That's the parallel between Joshua and us. And so to quote the psalm, your word, O Lord, is a lamp unto our feet. Now you can look at this in two ways, that in order for it to be a lamp on a path unto our feet, it must mean that we're going somewhere, and that's one way of looking at it. But as I've already said, God's kingdom is coming on earth. Everything is going to change down here. And so the lamp to our feet is really the mission that we're on.

[13:14] Okay. The lamp, which is God's word, lights the path that we're to walk. Let me just say that again. In order to understand how we are to walk and where we are to walk, the word of God lights the path that we're to walk on. If we step off or away from the word, then we step off and away from the light, and we step off and away from the path that God wants us to go. Everything revolves around the word when it comes to God fulfilling his purposes in your life and on earth as it is in heaven. Everything, absolutely everything revolves around this. And so I have a question for us.

And the question is this, that is the word of God a lamp unto your feet as it should be? Or is the word of God like the torch you can't find in the dark?

In other words, we run to the word of God when we've lost our way, when our own ways have not turned out the way that we thought that it would, when our own ways have not become as profitable as we thought they would be, and then we sort of revert to the light. Quick, where's the torch?

I'm stood here in the darkness, and the one thing I need to see in the darkness is the thing that I can't find. Okay. So is the word of God a lamp unto your feet, so it's perpetually in front of you, so that you're constantly walking in the light? Or have you wandered off the track, and when things get tough and things don't turn out the way that you want them to, you know, the priorities are different, whatever it may be, you then go searching for the light. But we've all been there where none of us are expecting the lights to go out, and suddenly, where's the torch?

Where's the candles? Where's the matches? Okay. The lamp unto your feet is the perpetually being prepared. The world is dark. You have to make your way through it, and God has provided something that never goes out. You can walk off the path, you can walk away from it, but it will never be dark on the path that God wants us to walk. And so Joshua is in this place before God where everything relies on him walking in line with the word of God. Now, if he's the leader, it follows that everyone else who is following him is resting on the fact that he is going to keep close to the word in order for them to follow him. Now, if they don't follow him, as they don't in Joshua 24, we'll get to see what that means. And so God's concern for his people, as it is in Joshua, as it is repeated in Hebrews, is that we don't turn from the word of God to strange and diverse things or teachings, but we let the word do the work. We simply follow, but let the word do the work. And so we pick it up here in Joshua chapter 1 with Moses, and he's dead. Now, there's much to be, much to remember about

[16:40] Moses, and there's much to be imitated from Moses's life, as Hebrews would put it. But of course, there's quite a lot of things in Moses's life that are not to be copied or imitated at all.

And so, you know, do this, but don't do that. He's a good example here, but he's not necessarily a good example there. But the lesson is still the same, that Moses is a leader who fails, like all leaders.

All leaders fail. They have their failures. God allows room for failure. But here, the failure of Moses means that he doesn't enter into the promised land. He dies outside the land. Okay, it doesn't mean that God doesn't love him. It doesn't mean that God doesn't care. It doesn't mean that God is disposing of him or sort of leaving him. It simply means that he didn't obey God in what he had to obey, and that was the consequence of his own behavior. Joshua is now to take up the leadership from where Moses finished. Moses has died, and God passes this commission on to Joshua.

Joshua, you're the man. You're the one who's now going to be responsible to do what Moses had done. In other words, Moses, imagine having the ministry of Moses, a journey that should have only took a number of days, wandering around in a circle for 40 years. Imagine that you were a critic of Moses, and your critique of his ministry was, he's done nothing for 40 years. Okay, but that was his ministry.

That's what God did. God knew that when he called him to lead these people out, that was going to happen. Joshua, however, will make it into the promised land, and so this is the call of God to

Joshua's life. He says that no man's going to be able to stand before you all the days of your life, just as I was with Moses, so also I will be with you. I will not leave you, and I will not forsake you. But does that apply to me? Does it apply to you? I mean, God is saying it to Joshua, he's not saying it to me. God is saying to Joshua, just as I was with Moses, I will be with you, but he's not said, just as I was with Joshua, Daniel, I will be with you. In other words, I can't get to me from this passage. I can't go, well, this is, just as God would not leave Moses and would not forsake Moses, and just as God would not leave Joshua and not forsake Joshua, then it must mean that he won't do that to me. But I can't get there from Joshua, and the writer of the Hebrews knows it. [19 : 35] And so the reason why Hebrews reaffirms this is because he's reaffirming it for the New Testament Christian, and therefore reassuring to the Christian that just as God was with the people of old, he will be with you in exactly the same way. Now, I know that sometimes we read our Bibles and we take everything as though it was written to us rather than it being written for us. Okay, Joshua was written for us, not to us, and so not, when God says this to Joshua, it's just meant for Joshua.

But in Hebrews, the reason why that's so important is because he's reaffirming to every New Testament believer, look, just as God was with all of those in the past who he did not leave and he did not forsake, go read the history and just see for yourself that God did not leave any of these behind.

That God, that same God, will be the same way with you. How reassuring is that? That is just incredible encouragement. That God will be with me as he was with Joshua. That God will be with me as he was with Moses. That he will not leave me. He will not leave you. He will not forsake me. He will not forsake you. That just as he was with them, he will also be with us. Just think about that. Just stop and think how, just how amazing and how wonderful that is. That here I sit and stand with all my doubts and all my fears and all my failings and what must God think?

Well, he'll never leave us. He'll never forsake us. He does, however, tell Joshua to be strong and to be courageous and to not turn from the word of God. He's not allowed to turn to the right.

[21 : 49] He's not allowed to turn to the left. He is to stay on track. C.S. Lewis once said when he was trying to teach people how to write, and this is in much the same way when you're teaching a Bible class or a Sunday school class or even an adult Bible study, the same thing applies. He says that you want to get people to the end of the path, and at the end of the path there's a gate that you want to get the people through. The trouble, however, is that all the way down this path there are gates that are open, and your job as a writer is to lead them down the path and to close these gates so that they go through the gate that you want to get them through. And God is saying to Joshua in much the same way, this is where I want you to go. Do not turn to the left. Do not turn to the right. Do not walk through those other diversions, those other gates. Go here. And sometimes we think in our Christian life there are shortcuts. There are no shortcuts. Sometimes we think that, you know, missing, going in this direction and going in this direction said it won't be that costly.

We convince ourselves that the cost is either not that great, or if it is great, it's worth paying, and then we get ourselves into all sorts of trouble because we have turned to the right or we've turned to the left rather than staying on track. And God says that if you stay on track and you do not turn to the left or to the right, then you will have success. But success here is not worldly success. It cannot be measured in worldly terms. Success is the ability to fulfill the mission that God has given you. You want to be successful? Then the only way to be successful is to stay super, super clear and close to the Word of God. And that success cannot be measured by anyone else. It cannot be measured by worldly things. There are plenty of people who want to measure other men's ministry and other women's ministry in other churches. We measure churches in different ways. You just can't do it. And you can't do it because you don't know what God is fulfilling in and through the people that he's using.

What if he uses one man simply to tear down and another man simply to build up? We would call in one form of measurement that one man is a failure and the other man is a success.

But in terms of fulfilling the mission that God has given each person, both succeed. But both succeed in their given callings and missions. And this is what Joshua has to understand. The measurement, the way to measure whether or not you have actually been successful is whether or not you've actually completed or are doing the very thing that God has called you to do. That's the measurement. Not whether or not you've got anywhere with it, not whether or not you've measured it to any measurement that you come up with, but whether or not you're actually doing what God

wants you to do. That's success. That is the godly success that he promises when you let the word do the work. And so in Hebrews, this is repeated in many ways, in that in order for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we too must not turn from God's word to diverse and to strange teachings. We must stay on point. We must stay on track. We must let

[25 : 46] God's word do the work. Now the reason for this is because the welfare of the leader, the welfare of the people, and the benefit or the strength of the mission depends on it. In the time that we all live between what was and what will be, okay, and the bit in between is this mission. We're not on a journey.

We're here to fulfill a mission, okay? We're not on a journey. We're here to fulfill a mission. Now Joshua, just like the leaders in Hebrews, has a particular undertaking that the rest of the people don't have in the same way. Everybody has to listen to the word of God and obey the word of God and follow God, but not everybody is given the responsibility to instruct others with the word of God, and that responsibility falls to Joshua. Joshua is not to think that he can come up with a better idea than God, or to put it in the words of somebody else, you know, Jesus Christ will build his church, and I am certainly not going to compete with him. Okay, let the word do the work. But he must, verse 8, as a leader, meditate on the word of God day and night, so that, here's the reason, this is the reason why God wants Joshua not to depart from the word of God, but to meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do all that is written in it, for then, okay, for then you will have good success. So that's God's reasoning. Stick close to the word of God, because by staying close to the word of God, you will then be careful to do all that's written in it, and when you're careful to do that all that is written in it, then, for then, you will have good success. In other words, let the word do the work. Let your life be completely directed by God's word. And so we see very clearly that the successive mission is undeniably linked, controlled, and directed by how close Joshua keeps his life to the word of God. And Hebrews is effectively saying the same thing, that the church will follow the direction of how close it is to God's word. And so the church always goes in the direction that the word of God takes them in, unless, of course, they don't follow the word of God.

And so this isn't the first time of how much time a leader has to spend in the word of God. Poor old Joshua is being told to spend day and night in the word of God. Now, God has a lot to say about how much time people should spend in the word. And if you have ever led a Sunday school lesson, or a Bible class, or a house group, you will know the feeling of what it's like to be unprepared. You know that feeling? Now, there are two ways in which you can be unprepared. If you're using somebody else's material, it's not quite so bad. It can still be a massive pressure, but it's not quite so bad because somebody else's material has done a lot of the work for you. But imagine you're doing the Sunday school lesson straight from the Bible, or the house group lesson straight from the Bible. And suddenly, you've now got nobody else to rely upon other than yourself and God and the word of God. And then you get to the evening, or you get to the morning, or the afternoon, whenever you're doing the lesson, and you feel the pressure of being unprepared. It's debilitating. And if it's debilitating for a group of five, or six, or ten, or fifteen, imagine what it would be like to lead the people of God for Joshua. I mean, what have you got to say if you've not studied God's word? You've got nothing to say. And what happens is you default to what you already know. So people can never go any further forward because you're constantly defaulting to what you already know, rather than moving forward in the whole of God's word. Well, that's the pressure that Joshua is under, to meditate on it day and night in order to look after his people. But I think Joshua has the most humorous congregation in history.

[30 : 45] I think they're just a bunch of lass. And I'm going to tell you why. When Joshua begins to tell God's people what God has told him, I don't know if it's full of sarcasm or full of just what were they thinking. But he begins to tell them in verse 10 through to 18, and just listen to a moment to their response in verse 16 through to 18. Joshua has just told them exactly what God has told him. And they respond, verse 16, and they answered Joshua, all that you have commanded us, we will do.

And wherever you send us, we will go. Now, as a leader, you're thinking, great. You know, the church isn't a democracy. God's people is not a democracy. Great. And then the next verse, they say, just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Hang on a minute. Are you kidding me? Are you really serious here? Because you don't have to go back too far to see that they didn't obey Moses. I don't know what kind of confidence building that could have been for Joshua to hear, just as we obeyed Moses, so also we will obey you, because Joshua was there.

Great. Do you remember whether or not you obeyed Moses? I mean, I didn't imagine the kind of conversation that would have come off here, but, you know, it's one thing for a congregation to say, you know, just as we obeyed our last pastor, we will also obey you. What do you think the new pastor's going to do? He's going to ask the old pastor? Because it doesn't mean anything. It doesn't mean anything unless there's the point of reference. And Joshua is almost as if they forgot that Joshua was there. Just as we obeyed Moses, we will also obey you. But did they? [33 : 03] No. Because the story ends, you'll remember, in Joshua 24, and we've looked at this together, with him drawing the line in the sand. And he says to God's people, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And on which line of the sand are you going to stand?

They didn't. They didn't. Joshua kept to the word, to the end. And in the end, he drew a line in the sand and said, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Come away from your diverse and strange ways. You've turned to the right. You've turned to the left. You have not kept to the word. Come away. Recommit. Rededicate. Repent. And turn back to the Lord, your God. That's where we have that wonderful, you know, some of us have it on our walls. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Well, do you know what it really means? It means that you're going in the opposite direction than the most of God's people. That's what it meant for Joshua. The statement meant that he was going in a different direction than most of God's people. Until that was, they repented and turned from their ways and came back to the Lord.

Well, let me wrap it up with this. Here's the principal point. The direction of your life will change as you turn from the word of God. The direction of your life can only ever go in God's direction if you let the word of God do the work in your life. The word is a lamp unto your feet.

It is a thing to be adhered to. It is a thing to follow. It is a thing, as we learned last week, to take deep into your heart, not to be kept onto the surface, but actually to affect you in the most personal parts of your being. While there is a clear difference between a leader and a congregation, nevertheless, we are all God's people, and all of us have to stay close to God's word in order to stay on the right path. And the path that God's people should take is always the path that is lit by God's word. That's the direction that we're to go in. God's people should never forget that God's word was with Moses and was with Joshua and kept them safe. But God's people went astray when they went astray from what God had said. The calling is this, that God has plenty of requirements for his church and for his people, but God has plenty of resources to back every single one of them up. God knows that we have to live on a mission in between two worlds, in between two realities. And the resources that he gives us to fulfill the requirements are firstly himself. God will never leave us or forsake us.

[36 : 26] The requirement is go to do mission, fulfill my will. The resource is God. I will never leave you, nor will I forsake you. The requirement is follow my will, follow my way, and the resource is my word.

God's word is life. Do not turn to the right or to the left, but follow it. And thirdly, his grace. As Hebrew says, the grace that strengthens the hearts of those who are doing his will.

So you want to be strong. You want to be courageous. You want to be able to get through this Christian life and do what God actually wants you to do. Well, there is only three things that God requires you to draw on. Himself, his word, and his grace. That is how you can be strong and courageous.

Jesus Christ, it says, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Meaning this, that just as Jesus was with all of those before our time, he will also be with us now. There is no double standard. Jesus treats us exactly the same as he's treated all of his brothers and sisters in him. So the spiritual priority for us this evening is fairly clear. Last week it is, what rules your heart?

[37 : 55] What rules your heart? This week we can look at it in a slightly different way and ask, what runs your life? What is it that is running your life? And the answer is the same for both.

It ought to be the word. God's word. Do not turn to the right. Do not turn to the left. But rather, follow the word through the leaders who speak the word of God to you. Amen.