

## ~ Are Ye Slack to Go? ~

**Text:** Joshua 18-19

**Theme:** God has a place and a plan for every individual and it is his desire that we be faithful in the place he has called us to.

**Intro:**

1. Last week we looked at chapters 16-17.
  - a. We took the challenge that, as Christian, we need to beware of becoming grumbling Christians who have become discontented with what God has given us.
  - b. We also noted that it is wrong to try and enter into the reward of another mans labours, and that past victories are not a guarantee of future blessing.
2. In chapters 18-19 we find Joshua exhorting the people to get back to the work of obtaining the entirety of the inheritance God intended them to have.
  - a. The children of Israel were in the land but had failed to properly divide the land among the tribes and families. God had a proper order for the tribes to settle in, and they had not been diligent to being God's plan to pass.
  - b. For the sake of our study today we will take the following three headings and chapter divisions.
    - I. The Rebuke of Slackness (Josh 18:1-3)
    - II. The Solution for Slackness (Joshua 18:4-10)
    - III. The Shunning of Slackness (Joshua 18:11 – 19:51)

**Main:**

- I. **The Rebuke of Slackness** (Josh 18:1-3)
  - A. The occasion for the rebuke (Vs 1-2)
    1. The occasion for the rebuke was the gathering of the tribes for the setting up of the Tabernacle in Shiloh.
      - a. The Tabernacle was effectively a portable temple in which the Ark of the Covenant was kept during the years of Israel's wandering the wilderness and the early days of the occupation of Canaan.
        - i. When Israel was in the wilderness the Tabernacle was continually packed up and carried with Israel as God moved them from place to place.
        - ii. The Tabernacle was a large, ornate tent which had a fence made of fine twined linen around it (Exo 27:9) and inside it were two rooms known as the holy place, which

was where the Golden Candle stick, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense were, and the second room, the holy of holies, was where the Ark of the Covenant was and where the shekinah glory of God dwelt above the cherubim.

- b. After entering Canaan, the Tabernacle was set up at Gilgal, where Israel's main encampment was.
  - i. Now the tabernacle was moved to Shiloh which is where the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant remained until the days of Samuel the prophet.
  - i. When Samuel was a young lad, Eli's two sons took the Ark of the Covenant out of Shiloh to the battle against the Philistines, where it was lost in the battle. After the Philistines returned it, the Ark went to Beth-shemesh for a time before being kept at Kiriath-Jearim until King David brought it up to Jerusalem.
2. Seven of the tribes had not received their inheritance in the land.
  - a. These tribes were just as problematic as the tribe of Joseph.
    - i. The tribe of Joseph has already received their inheritance and were still complaining about wanting more land, even while their brethren were waiting to receive a portion.
    - ii. These seven tribes were just a problematic since they had entered the land and participated in the early battles, but now they had become content to stay in the land of their brethren, rather than go and possess a land all of their own.
    - iii. "Seven tribes still had to have their inheritance marked out for them, and apparently they were slow to respond to the challenge. Unlike Caleb and the daughters of Zelophehad, these tribes didn't have faith and spiritual zeal. These tribes had helped fight battles and defeat the enemy, but now they hesitated to claim their inheritance and enjoy the land God had given them."<sup>1</sup>
- B. The source of the rebuke (Vs 3)
  1. Joshua brought the problem to light with a direct question.
    - a. Joshua 18:3 asks the question, "How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of you fathers hath given you?"
      - i. Israel was in the land, but they had stopped growing in the occupation of the land.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [Be Strong](#), "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 128.

- ii. It seems that they, like the tribe of Joseph, had become tired of fighting for more land and had decided that, unless it came to them easily, they would just as soon stay where they were.
- b. Joshua identified the root cause of their failure to finish dividing the land as being slackness on the part of the people.
  - i. Joshua's question, "how long?" indicates that this had been the state of things for some time now. They had come this far and then they had become stagnant.
  - ii. Perhaps it began as a brief stop for rest and recuperation, but over time it became the constant state of things and the progress was never resumed.
- c. For the Christian, it is possible to be saved and yet have stopped growing spiritually.
  - i. Growing in prayer.
    - The Christian needs to maintain a vibrant prayer life in order to keep growing spiritually, but it is easy for us to become slack in this area, particularly if we have lost our vision for the future.
    - The Christian who has stopped looking for God to move them forward is a Christian who has stopped praying for God to take them forward.
  - ii. Growing in the Word.
    - Our depth of understanding in God's Word is another essential area of growth. One can hardly expect to grow spiritually who doesn't exercise his heart and mind in the study of God's Word.
  - iii. Growing in victory over sin.
    - The Christian who is growing in their spiritual walk ought also to be a Christian who is becoming less like the world and more like Christ. With that comes a measure of holiness and victory over the sins of the flesh.
    - If you are not growing in prayer and in the Word, then you are unlikely to grow in the area of victory over sin and self. These two spiritual exercises are needed in the spiritual battle.

**Psalm 119:11** *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."*
  - iv. Growing in service. (Exercise of spiritual gifts)
    - To grow in service is about more than just being a busy person, it is about using your spiritual gifts to further the Lord's work, especially in the local church.

- Again, it is possible to have a saved soul and a wasted life. We need to consider what specific talents God has given us and use those talents to minister to our brothers and sisters in Christ and further the work of the gospel.

## II. The Solution for Slackness (Joshua 18:4-10)

### A. Prepare to do the work

1. Joshua organised the people for the purpose of doing the work God intended.
  - a. Joshua organized for 3 men from each tribe (21 total) to go and survey the land in preparation for dividing it among the people.
    - i. There were only seven tribes left for the land to be divided amongst.
      - Ruben, Gad, and East Manasseh had already received their land on the east of Jordan.
      - Judah and Joseph had received the first two lots within the land.
      - The priesthood of the LORD was the inheritance of the Levites.
    - ii. The remainder of the land would be divided between the seven tribes who had not yet received their inheritance.
  - b. Joshua organised for the people to gather in Shiloh before the Ark of God.
    - i. The division of the land between the remaining seven tribes was to be done according to the Word of God and not according to their own wants and wishes.
    - ii. The land was divided by lot. This was not gambling but a way of leaving things in God's hands.
      - **Proverbs 16:33** *"The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD."*
    - iii. This is a reminder that everything we have comes from the hand of God. As God gave Israel the land and divided it among the tribes, God still gives in abundance to those who trust in him and follow his will.

## III. The Shunning of Slackness (Joshua 18:11 – 19:51)

### A. The land was divided according to God's plan

1. The result of Joshua's rebuke of their slackness and subsequent organisation of the people was that the land was divided among the people as God had intended.

- a. These verses might seem somewhat boring at first glance due to the long list of cities; however, God doesn't simply summarize these details saying, "the rest got some land too." The details are given as a reminder of two important truths.
  - i. God is faithful to keep his promises to each of his children. Although the land was promised to Israel as a nation, God's promise was ultimately fulfilled for each family in the nation.
    - This is a reminder to us as Christians that, the promises of God's Word are for every Christian and may be claimed on a personal level.
    - Personal promises:
      - ~ Wisdom to those who ask (Jam 1:5)
      - ~ Forgiveness to those who confess (1 John 1:9)
      - ~ Provision according to his riches in Christ (Phil 4:19)
  - b. Everyone has a God ordained place within God's plan for his people, and the local church.
    - i. Every member of the church has been placed here by God to take part in the work.

The Lord is the one who adds to his church and if he has brought you here, he has plans for you while you are here.
    - ii. Every Christian has been given gifts by God to be used in the local church.
- B. Joshua is an excellent example of leadership.
  1. He rebuked complacency (18:3)
    - a. Joshua was prepared to go against the grain and rebuke the people's slackness.
      - i. Joshua could have taken the easy road and simply encouraged the people for how far they had already come, but this would have only served to affirm them in their complacency.
      - ii. The problem wasn't ignorance of God's will; the problem was inactivity and an unwillingness to perform God's will in its entirety. Joshua rightly identified the problem and rebuked the people.
    - b. We need spiritual leaders in every generation who are willing to call out sin and complacency in the church and rebuke these failings with the authority of God's Word.
      - i. Often, the one who brings the rebuke ends up being the one who takes the heat, which is why many preachers will settle for preaching only "smooth things" (Isa 30:10) rather than risk having people turn against them.

- c. Joshua also recognised that delay in doing God's will is actually disobedience.
  - i. While there may have been a time for a short rest before taking the remainder of the land, the people seem to have allowed that short rest to turn into a refusal to finish the job God had given them.
  - ii. To delay in doing God's will is to disobey God, and God is not content with partial obedience, as we saw when we were studying the life of King Saul.
2. He organised the people in preparation for going forward. (18:4-6)
  - a. This is another area in which Joshua was a great leader. He didn't just say "how long are ye slack to go?" He followed his challenge with a practical plan that enabled the people to move forward.
    - i. A good leader is able to do more than just tell people where they are getting things wrong. A good leader shows people how to get it right.
    - ii. Joshua had already set the example by his own life. He was one of only two spies who believed God and urged Israel to possess the land by faith. Before he ever instructed others, he had already demonstrated what faith and obedience looked like.
  - b. Joshua had showed the people how they ought to live by his personal example and now he gave them practical steps for replicating that in their own lives.

That is good leadership.
3. He brought the matter before the Lord in Shiloh (18:9-10)
  - a. The third area of leadership we notice is Joshua's desire to point the people back to God, rather than allowing them to be dependent upon Joshua, as their human leader.
    - i. The land belongs to God, and it was from the hand of God that Israel received the land as their inheritance. It is quite fitting then, that Joshua should bring the people before the Lord and there divide the land between the remaining 7 tribes.
  - b. This is an excellent pattern for spiritual leadership. The goal should be to point people to God who is the true Guide of His people.
    - i. Joshua's attitude of submission to God's will and guidance for the people is seen in that great declaration he makes in chapter 24 and verse 15, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*"

4. He received his own inheritance last – showing servant leadership (19:49-51)
  - a. Joshua could have claimed the best land first and probably no one would have challenged him.
    - i. Joshua was the leader of Israel, one of only two of the original conquerors of Canaan, and God had his hand of blessing on him. Despite this, Joshua didn't use his position of leadership to take advantage of the people of God and to get the best of the land for himself.
    - ii. Joshua put the people and their benefit before himself and his potential gains. Joshua shows us that leadership involves sacrifice, but that is the leadership God blesses.
  - b. Leaders who insist on being first are not the greatest in God's economy.
    - i. **Mathew 20:26-27** *"But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:"*
    - ii. If we would be great leaders, then we have to learn to be great servants first.
  - c. When it comes to church ministries, we need to keep the servant heart at the forefront of our labours.
    - i. Many Christians look at church ministries such as the choir or the Sunday school, the song-leading or the preaching, and they see positions of power rather than positions of service.
    - ii. Whenever you enter into a leadership role within the church, whether it is heading up the team in the kitchen or organising the ushers on the door, each leadership role should be seen not as an area of greater authority but as an area of greater servanthood.
  - d. God rewarded Joshua for his faithful servant-leadership as seen in verse 50.
    - i. In the end, God allowed Joshua to have the reward he could have tried to claim for himself, which was the reward of choosing a city for himself.
    - ii. **Psalms 37:9** *"For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth."*

#### Conclusion:

1. Have you become slack in your Christian walk? Have you allowed a time of rest turn into a lengthy period of complacency?

- i. The Christian who has stopped looking for God to move them forward is a Christian who has stopped praying for God to take them forward.
- 2. Have you made plans for getting on board and doing God's work?
  - i. The Lord is the one who adds to his church and if he has brought you here, he has plans for you while you are here. What is it that God wants to do through you?