

~ Joshua's Exhortation to Israel ~

(Love the Lord Your God)

Text: Joshua 23

Key Verse: Joshua 23:11

Theme: A real love for God will keep you from all manner of sin and harm.

Intro:

1. As I mentioned last week, in these closing chapters of the book of Joshua we are no longer dealing with the conquest and division of the Promised Land.
 - a. In chapters 1-12 we saw the conquest of the land.
 - b. In chapters 13-21 we saw the division of the land.
 - c. In chapters 22-24 we see the dwelling in the land.
2. Today, we are looking at Joshua's Exhortation to Israel.
 - a. Verse 1 of the chapter tells us that the events of chapter 23 occurred quite some time after the events recorded in chapter 22.
 - i. At the end of chapter 21 we find that great declaration of God's faithfulness to fulfill all his promises in giving Israel the Promised Land, victory over their enemies, and rest round about them.
 - ii. Chapter 22 followed on from those events with the record concerning Joshua's dismissal of Ruben, Gad, and half of Manasseh from the military duties of the conquest and then the subsequent misunderstanding regarding the altar built by Jordan.
 - iii. In our study last week, we took the theme *One God – One Altar – One People* and noted that today there is still only one God and one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, and in him we are all one people.
 - b. For our study this morning we will take the following chapter divisions.
 - I. The Occasion for the Exhortation (Vs 1-5)
 - II. The Instruction in the Exhortation (Vs 6-11)
 - III. The Warning in the Exhortation (Vs 12-16)

Main:

- I. **The Occasion for the Exhortation** (Vs 1-5)
 - A. The Farewell of Joshua (Vs 1-2)
 1. Joshua was now an aged man, having lived to a ripe old age.
 - a. Verse 1 of the chapter points out that Joshua's exhortation was given a long time after God had given Israel rest.

- i. It is impossible for us to know just how many years transpired between the division of the land and the death of Joshua; however, we know from chapter 24 that Joshua was 110 years old at the time of his death.
 - **Joshua 24:29** *"And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old."*
 - ii. We know that Caleb was 85 years when he took Mount Hebron from the giants there. Many people assume that Joshua and Caleb were probably similar in age which would mean 25 years passed between the taking of mount Hebron and the death of Joshua.
 - b. Joshua called all Israel together because he had some things he wanted to say to them before his death.
 - i. Joshua announced his condition to the people, making it clear that he didn't expect to live much longer. Joshua was a man of faith who wasn't afraid of or trying to hide from the reality of death.
 - While doorknocking, I once encountered an elderly man who told me he was attending this social group where, I believe, a psychiatrist was trying to help them learn how not to fear death. He refused to hear the gospel because it required him to face the reality that he would die one day.
 - ii. For those who are saved, death holds no fear.
 - **Psalms 23:4** *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."*
- B. The Testimony of Joshua (Vs 3-5)
- 1. Remember what God has done (Vs 3)
 - a. Remember the destruction of these nations
 - i. The children of Israel had entered a land that was full of enemies all around and God had brought them to a place of *"rest round about"* (Josh 21:44).
 - ii. What Joshua was saying was, in effect, look around at the nations God destroyed so that you could have this land for your inheritance, number them all and be thankful. *"Count your blessings name them one by one."*
 - b. Remember the power of our God
 - i. Joshua wanted them to remember that it was God who fought for them in the conquest. There was to be no room for self-congratulation. It was a work of God from start to

finish and without God's presence going before them, Israel could not have conquered the land.

- ii. The conquest truly was a testimony of God's power. A people who had no fortresses, no siege equipment, and had just travelled for 40 years as nomads in a desert were able to overcome the greatest armies in the region, destroy their cities, and establish themselves as the primary inhabitants of the entire region.

Only the power of God could have accomplished that!

2. Remember what God has given (Vs 4)

- a. Having directed their gaze heavenward, Joshua now reminds them of the nations that have been allocated to their inheritance but have not yet been conquered.
 - i. This was a practical way of saying, "Look back at what God has already done for you, now with God's help, go forward and conquer the rest of those heathen nations.
 - ii. Remember that God has already given them into your hand, so what are you waiting for?
- b. The Old Testament, including the book of Joshua, involves a lot of looking back at what God has done and taking courage for the future.
 - i. I know that we ought to be able to take God at his Word and trust that he will fulfill everything he has promised, but it can often be reassuring for us to look back over the time when we have clearly seen God's hand at work in our own personal lives and take courage from that to trust him for the future.

3. Remember what God will do (Vs 5)

- a. Joshua was able to confidently tell that that they would be successful in conquering these other nations.
 - i. Joshua had the same confidence in God that Caleb had.
 - **Joshua 14:12** *"Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said."*
- b. The whole basis for the conquest was "Israel can't but God can." And the whole basis for the Christian life is "I can't but, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Phili 4:13)"*
 - i. It has been rightly observed that the Christian life is a miracle from start to finish.
 - Salvation is a miracle work of God.

- Sanctification is a miracle work of God.
- Prevailing prayer invokes the miracle power of God.
- Walking in victory over sin comes only through the miraculous power of God, as we walk in the Spirit.
- ii. No one can live a life that is pleasing to God unless they are walking in the power of God, the same power that raised up Jesus from the dead, and the only power by which we can live the crucified life, as Christians.

II. The Instruction in the Exhortation (Vs 6-11)

A. Cleave unto the LORD your God (Vs 6-8)

1. Keep the Word of God (Vs 6)

- a. Joshua's first word of instruction to Israel was a command to follow God Word without exception.
 - i. Joshua's command to Israel, here at the end of Joshua's life, is strikingly similar to the command God gave Joshua before he began the conquest.
 - **Joshua 1:7-8** *"Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."*
 - ii. We have noted this theme in other passages but it seems quite clear that Joshua was passing the baton to the next generation and saying, "Keep following God just as I taught you to do while I was with you."
- b. Their keeping of God's law as to be without exception.
 - i. Notice that he instructed Israel to "keep and to do all."
 - The word "keep" means to safeguard, or hedge about.
 - ii. Israel was to protect the purity of God's commandments and to obey those commandments without exception.
 - iii. There are no shortcuts in obedience to God. You cannot pick and choose the areas in which you will be obedient. Only full obedience will please God.

2. Keep away from sin (Vs 7)

- a. They were not to mingle with the ungodly.

- i. If Israel kept and obeyed God's commandments it would help to protect them from being tempted to mingle with the heathen nations around them who lived in rebellion against God's Word.
 - b. They were not to adopt the practices of the ungodly.
 - i. The ungodly practices of the heathens were to be rejected, especially the religious practices.
 - ii. The idols of the nations that Israel did not conquer became a constant snare to Israel and resulted in long periods of backsliding followed by invasion by a foreign army as punishment for forsaking the LORD God.
 - iii. If they would keep God's commandments and do them it would keep, or guard them from going after heathen Gods.
 - When Israel became slack in their worship of God, sinful practices and idolatry were right around the corner.
3. Cleave to the LORD your God (Vs 8)
- a. They were to cling to the LORD as they had done up until Joshua's death.
 - i. The word "cleave" means to cling to, adhere to, or catch by pursuit.
 - ii. The idea is that they were to adhere to God and His commandments so closely that nothing could pull them away or distract them from following God.
 - b. The antithesis to clinging to God is clinging to paganism, worldliness, ungodliness, and any other thing that is not supposed to be a god in your life.
 - i. I want to give you a thought to illustrate the problem here:
 - Imagine your life is like a ship which is afloat on the sea of life. When trials and temptations come and when circumstances arise in your life than would bring you grief, pain, or discouragement, those things are like winds in your sails and waves at the bow. Now, a ship that is properly anchored will have no trouble staying put through the storm gale, but a ship that has not yet been properly anchored is at the mercy of the storm and is driven wherever the storm would take it.
 - ii. The one Christian who is clinging to God will be able to remain steady no matter what life's storms may throw at them, but the Christian who has stopped clinging to God is bound to be tossed by the prevailing winds and maybe even sunk by life's burdensome waves.

- But “we have an anchor that keeps the soul, steadfast and sure while the billows roll, fastened to the rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Saviours love.”

B. Love the LORD your God (Vs 5-11)

1. Love for God produces deliverance (Vs 5 & 9-11)

- a. While Israel followed the LORD, they had victory over their enemies and God gave them peace and rest round about them.
 - i. Love for God keeps us under His blessing. As our love for God motivates us to walk in his will, we find that there is no greater place a blessing for us than to be in the will of God.
- b. Many Christians are afraid that, if they go all in for God and really surrender to Him, He will make them poor and miserable.
 - i. When that is our concern, it reveals that our chief priorities are selfish. There are far too many “things” that Christians have a greater desire for than their desire to please God.
 - They would rather have a high-end job with a six-figure salary and work 6 days a week for it than get involved in the work that is closest to God’s heart, which is soul-winning.
 - They would rather be loved by their work colleagues and peers than live a life that is approved unto God.
 - They would rather offend God through their sin and compromise with the world than risk offending the world by holy living and separation from sin.
 - ii. If you go all in for God, God will not allow you to miss out on anything that is good for you, and that’s a promise.
 - **Psalm 84:11b** “...no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

2. Love for God produces obedience (Vs 6 & 9-11)

- a. Love for God produces respect for his commandments.
 - i. If we have a genuine love for God, then we will want to live a life that pleases him by walking in his will and way.
 - **John 14:15** “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”
 - ii. When we walk in loving obedience to God’s Word and will for our lives then we will know the victory that only He can provide.
 - iii. I’ve said this before and I’ll say it again, you cannot expect to know God’s blessing on your life and to walk in spiritual victory unless you are surrendered to God’s will for your life.

- If you aren't walking in God's will then you can't expect God's blessing.
- b. Love for God will keep us from mere religious duty.
 - i. One of the hardest things you can do is serve God, year after year, through nothing more than a sense of religious duty.
 - When service isn't done out of love, it becomes a laborious procedure that must be endured for no other reason than that it makes me feel like I've done my bit to keep God happy, so I can go and live the rest of my week serving myself.
 - ii. I recently watched part of a live stream from a church, I believe it was Eastern Orthodox, and I found myself saddened by what I observed.
 - The priests there seemed to be offering prayers for dead people, and they walked around seeming to chant monastically in what I presume was Latin. I tell you, they sounded so bored and disinterested in what they were doing, it really was a dutiful religious procedure.
 - And the people sitting in the pews were casually looking around and shifting in their seats, I assume none of them understood Latin, and they were also dutifully present in body, but their hearts and minds were not on the service and certainly not on the worship of God.
 - iii. When you have a genuine love for God and your service flows out of a heart full of love, serving God ceases to be a chore or a heartless duty and is transformed into an expression of that love that pleases God.
- 3. Love for God produces separation (Vs 7 & 9-11)
 - a. Love for God protects us from the attraction of sin.
 - i. When we genuinely love God, we will hate the things that are offensive to God.
 - Imagine for a moment that there was someone who constantly spoke cruelly to your wife, husband, or someone you love. You would hate what they were doing, not because you hate the individual, but because their actions are hurting someone you love. If we truly love God, we will hate the things that he hates.
 - ii. Sinful habits cannot go undealt with when we have learned to love God more than our selves.

- b. Love for God will keep us from idolatry
 - i. For Israel, there were nations around them who worshipped false gods which were a snare to Israel.
 - Possibly one of the most attractive things about a false god and a false religion is that all they demand of you is that you outwardly conform to their religious practices.
 - False religion says, do your religious duty and then live as you please. It doesn't matter if your heart is in the right place so long as you conform outwardly.
 - The God of Christianity starts at the other end and says, get your heart right first and then the outward conformity and service will follow.
 - ii. The world around us offers many idols which we may be tempted to give service to.
 - The god of sports is one of them. I knew a family who came to church one Sunday completely out of sorts, devastated because their footy team lost the grand finale.
 - The god of work & money. I have heard of other pastors who said they knew someone who took a high paying job in a remote community and when the pastor asked them if there was a good church nearby for the family to attend, they had no idea. They were already preparing for the move, but they hadn't even considered their spiritual well-being.
 - The god of the self-image. Also known as keeping up with the Jones's. This is when keeping up with everything everyone else has is the priority. In our digital age where social media is everywhere, people are trying harder than ever to present a curated version of themselves that will make everyone think they're great. Self-image is the god of the selfie generation.

III. The Warning in the Exhortation (Vs 12-16)

A. The Warning Concerning Compromise (Vs 12-13)

- 1. Compromise with the heathen would bring pain and destruction upon themselves.
 - a. Joshua's warning here begins with an admonition against "go(ing) back".
 - i. God had brought Israel out of Egypt, which typifies the world and its ungodly system, and He had brought them

into the land of victory, which is a picture of the victorious Christian life. The heathen nations around them represent the spiritual enemy of the Christian and to compromise with these heathen nations was to fraternize with the enemy.

- This is a warning to Christians against compromise with the world. Far too many Christians are fence sitting Christians. They are always looking for ways to straddle the line between separation from the world and personal holiness.
- For these Christians, black and white exist, but there's a whole lot of "grey" in between and they struggle to draw a line, particularly on the hot topics of the day...
Music | Dress Standards | Bible Version | Alcohol
- ii. Christian, you were saved out of this world's system, you have a new identity, and your citizenship is in heaven now, so why would you go back and re-immense yourself in the worlds system? Don't go back!
- b. Joshua's warning reminds us of our total dependence upon God.
 - i. All the blessings Israel was now enjoying had all come from the hand of God.
 - It was God who had given them victory over their enemies.
 - It was God who had given them the land to dwell in.
 - It was God who had made them prosper in the land and blessed them with abundant crops.
 - It was God who had given them rest and peace within the land.
 - ii. If Israel turned away from God and compromised with the heathen nations around them, then all those material blessings would be forfeited along with many spiritual blessings and protection.
 - Joshua warned Israel that the very nations that they compromised with, God would use as a punishment for Israel, as snares and traps and scourges in their sides and thorns in their eyes.
 - The word "scourge" refers to a whip used to torture and inflict pain. It literally means they would create the whip for their own backs through their compromise.

2. "The principle here in verse 13 applies to all believers: any sins we allow to remain in our lives become traps and thorns to us."¹
 - a. Friendship with the world or adopting worldly practices will **Never** bring you closer to God. It will only ever take you away from God.
 - i. **James 4:4b** "...*Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*"
 - ii. When God's people begin to adopt the practices of the heathen people around them, they are setting themselves up to be vexed by the ungodly people they associate with.
 - **2 Peter 2:7-9** "*And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:*"
 - iii. God used the wickedness of the people around Lot to vex his soul in order to bring Lot to repentance. Although, Lot's reluctance to leave Sodom indicates that he hadn't yet reached the point where he was willing to forsake that wicked city, and God had to compel him to leave.
 - Once out, Lot went forward without looking back, but his wife turned back, revealing that her heart was in the city, and she was turned into a pillar of salt and thus she was judged with the inhabitants of the city.
- B. The Warning Concerning Transgression (Vs 14-16)
1. Notice that Joshua uses the example of God's faithfulness in blessing Israel and giving them the land He had promised as a guarantee that God would fulfill his promise to chastise Israel if they turned away from God.
 - a. Joshua was effectively saying, "Every good thing God promised you, He has given you. If you rebel against Him, you can be sure that He will keep his Word and bring all the evil upon you that promised."
 - i. We don't generally think of evil or hardship as being within the providence or faithfulness of God, but that is exactly what Joshua describes here.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [*Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), Jos 23.

- ii. When things are going great, we generally don't stop often to thank God, because we expect to receive good things from his hand. But when things go sour for us and we face hardship we are quick to ask God, "Why? Why did you allow this?"
 - b. What Joshua points out here is that both God's blessing and his chastisement extend from his faithfulness to His Word and His Character.
 - i. Remember what God said to Cain when he was angry because his offering was rejected, "**(Gen 4:7)** *"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door."*
 - ii. God's actions toward us are in accordance with our heart toward him. If your heart toward God is right then God will bless you, but if your heart has been turned away from God to sin then God will use the consequences of your sin as a whip for your own back, to bring you to repentance.
2. God had given Israel so many good things.
- a. Notice, in verses 13, 15, and 16 Joshua refers to the land God had given Israel as "good land".
 - i. Joshua was emphasising the goodness of God in giving them all that they had and saying, "Look at how much God has blessed you. Why would you give all of this up so you can go and worship the gods of the heathens?"
 - b. I wonder if God would say to his people today, "I have given you everything that you possess, from the land you own to the house you dwell in, and above this I have blessed you abundantly in material possessions. Have I not been a loving God toward you? Am I not enough for you, that you have gone looking for something more in the world that I saved you out of?"
 - i. Christian, you have been blessed beyond measure in Christ.
 - **Ephesians 1:3** *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:"*
 - ii. I wonder if there is an area of compromise in your life that God wants you to deal with? Something that has been causing you grief because it keeps you in a place of spiritual defeat as a Christian?
 - You have made a rod for your own back through your rebellion. Won't you give it up and return to God and seek blessings once again?

- iii. You know why you have no spiritual power in your life? It is the sin there that is grieving the Holy Spirit and hindering his work.
 - **Eph 4:30** *"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."*
 - For most Christians, and I mean most, it is the secret sin in their life that is keeping them from true spiritual blessing. The Lord Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly (John 10:10b)." An abundant life is a life that is lived in victory over indwelling sin.

Conclusion:

1. If we are going to know that abundant life where God is at liberty to bless us because we are in a right relationship with Him, then we need to get serious about separation from the world, we need to get serious about dealing with sin in our lives.
 - a. The Apostle Paul said in **Romans 6:7** *"For he that is dead is freed from sin."* The fact that our old man is dead, crucified with Christ, is a spiritual reality, but in practice we typically fail to die daily.
 - b. And so we go on trying to perform our spiritual "duties" in the power of a dead man, rather than learning to enter into the reality of the new life the Apostle Paul described when he said, *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: (Gal 2:20a)"*