

Joshua 23 – Reflections and Reminders from a Dying Man

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: There are many rags to riches story that show the power of perspiration and perseverance. I am sure you like those stories. But the Christian's story-your story-was quite different. You were in rags (破衣烂衫), walking alone as a slave of the Devil, heading to hell, with no desire to please God. Even your good works were like rags. But someone came out of pure love and rescued you. He gave you a new heart, a new record, and a new life. He gave you the hope of heaven... and everything you need before you get there. But having been raised from the mud to the mountain, what keeps you from going back to that muck (污秽) and mire (泥潭), what makes you serve God faithfully? You must learn to reflect on the greatness of your rescue. This is what you will hear about today from God, for indeed, Joshua's story is your story. The Jews are your people...your family.

Our headings are:

Joshua's Reflections on Israel's redemptive past (救赎历史)

Joshua's Reminders on how Israel were to live in the future

Our goals are: That you will reflect on the work of Jesus Christ on the cross for you and that you then, enable by his Word and Spirit, stay on the right path and invite others to join your family.

Joshua's Reflections on Israel's Redemptive Past

1 Now it came to pass, a long time after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age. 2 And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them: "I am old, advanced in age.

1. Joshua knew that most people would trust the testimony of a dying old man. (President Reagan was running for president at one time he pre-empted concerns about his old age from Mondale by pointing out that he wasn't going to use Mondale youth and lack of experience against him. Pres. Reagan's experience was helpful.) Using the advantage of his age and experience, Joshua took the time to reflect on the historic work of God for his people.

2. Joshua reflected on God's redemptive work in the past to encourage Israel to stay close to him.

Notice, like a good man of God, he never tried to take a shred of credit for what God did for Israel.

Deuteronomy 1:30 `The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes,

This is why we must sing: "Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life." This is why you are to "roll back the curtains of memory, now and then, and show me where you brought me from and where I could have been." And this is why you are to teach your children to sing and memorize these words. Let their salvation be on their minds.

3 "You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you. 4 "See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward.

3. What work did God do for Israel that gave them that rest...work of which they had to continually remind their children?

a. God fought for Israel and destroyed their enemies: God broke the bonds of slavery in Egypt and redeemed Israel. He destroyed the nations along the desert. He destroyed Jericho, Ai, Bethel, the 5 kings, the Great Confederacy and many more since. Even when they lost to Ai, it was a minor loss to teach them their need to depend upon God.

b. God gave Israel Canaan that he captured from their enemies...from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea, from Lebanon to Egypt!

Like Israel, your salvation – your redemption- was totally the work of God. You were in bondage – weary and heavy laden – in spiritual bondage (灵魂的捆绑) - to your will and the Devil's. But God rescued you when he bound the Devil when Jesus died on the cross. Now the Lord is your ever present help in time of trouble.

The difference is that Joshua announced temporary rest at Shiloh for Israel, but Jesus is the true Shiloh who assures the world of inner peace, ultimate peace, and eternal peace.

And doesn't preaching remind you of the work of the Jesus Christ – how he delivered you from darkness and brought you into his rest. In preaching all the details of his work and life are repeated, explained, and applied. You should never get tired of hearing of Christ's salvation. Don't miss preaching.

5 "And the LORD your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

4. Joshua also reflected on what God would do in the future as another means of motivating them to stay close to the Lord:

God would **drive out their enemies that remained** after those enemies finished their job of land sitting for Israel. He will lead you even in the darkest path.

Joshua's Reminders on how Israel were to live in the Future

6 "Therefore **be very courageous** to keep and to do all that is **written in the Book of the Law** of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, 7 "and **lest you go among** these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not **make mention of the name of their gods**, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not **serve them nor bow down to them**,

1. Joshua reminded Israel to be very courageous in the future – courageous to obey the Law of God. Joshua did not start by telling them to have great courage to fight their enemies, as important as that was. **Why did Joshua urge Israel to be very courageous to obey God's law (the Decalog 摩西的十诫)?** Joshua knew that if God's law was on man's heart, he would be focused on God's glory...and on serving the needs of his family. You see, sometimes a man fights in war because he feels ashamed. Sometimes he fights in a war for money. Sometimes he fights in a war for glory for himself. **But if you are fighting according to God's law** (love God and love your neighbor) you would keep you focus...and your eye wouldn't wander...you wouldn't be lured by the rewards and change your allegiances (忠诚). You would not be drawn to their feasts and lifestyles.

2. How is man able to obey God's law courageously? Man must have faith in Jesus Christ. **When one has faith he is focused on the honor of Christ and the good of his neighbor. This is the summary of the 10 laws. Further, when one has faith he is bold and can move mountains...**he can fight a giant...he does not balk (畏缩) at a lion. **When one has faith he has no fear of any enemy...**especially the enemy that is within...the enemy that is opposed to God's law... No one can obey God's law without true faith. **Yes, though the Devil is limited he will try to destroy the faith of children of light** (光明之子) as a roaring lion or an angel of light. (The Devil would love to neutralize your faith.) But when your faith is strong...and you are bold as a lion, you won't care about the pressure from your university professor...or your unbelieving co-worker. If you only have a sense of morality, but no faith, you will easily be taken prisoner. Note the decline: "go among these," "mention of the name of their gods," and "bow down."

11 "Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God. 12 **"Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations—**these that remain among you—**and make marriages with them,** and go in to them and they to you, 13 "know for certain that the LORD your **God will no longer drive out these nations from before you.** But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you. (你们要确实知道, 耶和华你们的神必不将他们从你们眼前赶出, 他们却要成为你们的网罗、机槛、肋上的鞭、眼中的刺, 直到你们在耶和华你们神所赐的这美地上灭亡。)

3. What would happen if Israel did not have the courage to obey God's law – if they lacked faith? Their enemies that remained in Canaan, those who were babysitting their land, would absorb them. Their eyes would wander among the Canaanites and they would intermarry with them. Weak marriages are underlined because they are so critical for the existence of the church. **What a curse! They would be absorbed (同化) by their enemies.** They would worship their gods. They would cease to be a people. Sadly, the Jews did not stay away from joining with their enemies, so in judgment, God sent them to many nations around the world – first in 722BC under the Assyrians, and then in 586BC under the Babylonians. They were spread and effectively neutralized.

Do you see how serious a warning this is for you today? Intermarriages with those of false religions are a trap that will squeeze the life out of you. Marrying weak Christians will make you sick and ineffective. If you marry a non-believer, you are more likely to follow their gods **because it is easier.** Hear God's warning.

Psalms 16:4 Their **sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god;** Their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, Nor take up their names on my lips. (以别神代替耶和华的, 他们的愁苦必加增, 他们所浇奠的血我不献上; 我嘴唇也不提别神的名号。)

8 "but you shall **hold fast to the LORD** your God, as you have done to this day.

4. Joshua reminded Israel why they needed to courageously hold fast (cleave) to the Lord – to his Word and his worship, just as Jacob held on to Jesus after the Lord humbled him in the wrestling match, or as a husband cleaves to his wife.

9 "For the **LORD has driven out** from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day. 10 **"One man of you shall chase a thousand,** for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.

a. Joshua reminded Israel what Covenant God did for them in the past: He drove out their enemies.

Exodus 14:13 And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. 14 "The LORD will fight for you, and you shall **hold your peace.**"

b. It was God had given them everything they had.

Deuteronomy 6:10 "So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, 11 "houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant--when you have eaten and are full-- 12 "then beware, **lest you forget the LORD**...

c. Joshua reminded Israel what God promised them: that they would gain victory over their enemies in the future and won't be afraid of them. And isn't the same true today? **If you hold on to God's promise,** you will be courageous to serve him in the midst of social decay.

14 "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that **not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you.** All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed.

5. Joshua reminded Israel that God never failed to do what he had promised. Who can say this about anyone...even of the godliest Christian...even of the most loving spouse? Who is able to do everything he has promised? How many times have you promised your parents to do something and then didn't? Who has done everything he has promised to a friend? **By saying that God's word never failed, Joshua was saying this he wanted to strengthen their faith in him.**

15 "Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you, **so the LORD will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land** which the LORD your God has given you. 16 "When you have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you."

6. After assuring them of the sweetness of God's provisions and promises, Joshua predicted that if Israel fell way from faithfulness and fell into folly 愚蠢 God would quickly destroy them. That falling away started immediately after Joshua's death. They did not heed Joshua's warning to avoid idolatry (偶像崇拜). They neglected their only hope. Like a child, they were quick to remind God's of his promises to give them things, but like a child, they did not want the other promise, the promise of discipline. But God remembers and fulfills all his promises. With that said, **how could Canada escape judgment if we ignore God's salvation?** Like Joshua said, the church must be faithful to avoid judgment. We must take our eyes off of the lures of this world and hold on to God's promises. Promises, God's promises- are essential to life.

Conclusion:

The aged Joshua reflected on the past and pointed out the redemptive work of God, how he provided and protected his people and gave them Canaan. Then Joshua reminded the people what their responsibilities were in order to continue to enjoy the blessings of God.

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ: **Learn to take the time to reflect on what God has done for you in Jesus Christ.** You learn this from **listening carefully to preaching and receiving the Sacraments** (认真听神的话语以及接受圣礼). When you reflect on what your former condition was and what God did for you in Christ **it will cause you to be careful how you live.** When you are tempted to stray from the truth, steal, ignore worship (忽视崇拜), commit adultery, covet, misuse God's name (误用神的名字) or tell a lie, you will remember what God has done for you. You will remember your unworthiness (不配). Then you will be ashamed of the thought of sinning, and you will return to faithful service to the Lord. Reflecting on your salvation is work, but it is good work.

Finally, if you are not a Christian you have nothing to which you can look back...except to confirm how shamefully sinful you are. But today you can look to Christ and let his punishment for sins be counted as yours. And then you can have a future...a future with hope.