

The God Who Keeps His Promises

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[0 : 0 0] So for a brief time this evening we're going to look together at the passage we read from the Bible, from God's Word in the book of Joshua. So if you have a Bible with you this evening, Joshua chapter 23, page 197.

But before we jump into the text together, I want to begin this evening with a question. I wonder what you would say your source of confidence is in your life.

For many people in our world today, confidence is found in things like physical appearance, in hair, in clothes, in makeup, and so on and so forth.

For other people, confidence is found in finance and having a stable job and a bank balance and all the material possessions that come along with that. For other people, confidence is found in people, in family, in friends, and having people around us.

The Bible this evening points us to a source of confidence that is outside of ourselves and outside of our circumstances, a source of confidence that will never fail us, never change and never let us down.

[1 : 1 0] So as we come together to look at God's Word, we're continuing our series through the book of Joshua. And at this stage in Joshua we've jumped over a lot of the dividing up of the land because a lot of the chapters are very much the same, the land allotted to Judah, the land allotted to Ephraim, and we wanted to save you seven weeks of land allotment.

So we've come to the end of the book where Joshua is making his farewell address to the people of God and he wants to pass on some essential truth to these people as they seek to live in the land and to live in the midst of people and nations in rebellion against God and all the difficult challenges and temptations that that presents them.

And he wants to remind them where their true confidence should lie. So we read in verse one, a long time afterwards when the Lord has given rest to Israel from all of their enemies, Joshua is old, well advanced in years, he summoned all of Israel and he makes this speech to them.

So this is the context to the passage we're looking at this evening. Joshua wants to remind the people of these three truths, three truths for being confident believers in a culture hostile to God. And we need those truths in our own lives today as we live in a world full of people around us who are not believers and who are in rebellion against God and hostile to Jesus Christ and to his kingdom.

[2 : 2 6] So three points this evening. First of all, in verse three, the first one, we should have confidence because God is the hero who fights for his people. Verse three says, you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the Lord your God who has fought for you.

So right at the end of his life, Joshua is looking back and he's reminding the people of God first and foremost that he is not the hero. He is not the reason for Israel's success and for all their victories. And this is really important because he has been the leader of Israel, of God's people since Moses died. And under his leadership, the people have experienced victory after victory after victory.

They have finally come to live in the land that God has promised them and God has given them the rest that they've been longing for. And so in many ways, this is a high point in their history, a long time of slavery in Egypt followed by 40 years wandering around the wilderness and they are finally at home in the land they've been looking forward to.

So it would be easy for them at this point to attribute their success, their victories, either to Joshua as their leader or to themselves and their own strength and their own courage.

[3 : 3 9] But the point we see in the book of Joshua time and time again is that God is the hero in salvation. God is the one who brings his people the victory.

God is a God who fights for his people. And so by implication, Joshua and the people are not the hero. Joshua is saying, I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I don't want you to think that your success is because of something you've done or because I'm a great leader.

When we look back through the book and through the chapters we've looked at over the last few months where they cross the Jordan, it's God who dries up the river and allows the people to cross. In the battle against Jericho the people march and blow their trumpets but it's God who brings down the walls.

And in all the other battles recorded for us in the book it's clear time and time again that the Lord God brings his people the victory. And so God's people should have confidence in God, the God who brings the victory.

Not only because of what he's done but because of what he will do. Verse five is talking about the enemies that remain in the land. He says they're the Lord your God will push them back before you. They will drive them out of your sight and you shall possess their land just as the Lord promised you.

[4 : 50] So Joshua's first concern here in this speech is he doesn't want the people to get the wrong idea. He wants them to recognize that God is the hero in salvation. And we take a step back from the book of Joshua and we look at the big picture of the Bible, the whole story of salvation.

We see that God time and time again is the main character in redemption. The Lord acting on behalf of his people is a central biblical truth.

And so it's a truth that's at the heart of our faith today. It's a truth that's at the heart of Christianity. The gospel is not about what you've done for God. It's first and foremost what God has done for you.

God acting on our behalf. So when our faith feels weak, when we feel maybe distant from God, when we feel weighed down by doubt or discouragement or burdens in the face of all the everyday struggles we have in the Christian life as God's people, when we feel we're going to be crushed by the weight of life's pressures, the gospel reminds us that God is for us, that God has acted on our behalf.

God is a God who fights for his people. And so that should be a huge source of confidence for God's people in the face of all kinds of opposition and difficulty.

[6 : 09] And so if we're a Christian this evening, we know that Jesus Christ has secured the victory for us. He has conquered sin and death. He has made it possible for deeply flawed and sinful and weak people to come to know a God who is holy and righteous and perfect.

And so we can enjoy the forgiveness and hope and new life through Jesus. Paul echoes this kind of confidence in the passage he read in Romans in chapter 8. He says, if God is for us, who can be against us?

You see, Christian faith is not just wishful thinking. It's not just a blind optimism for the future. It's not some kind of crutch we hold on to just to get us through the tough times.

Faith is a complete and utter confidence in the God who secures the victory for his people. Paul went on in that passage to say, who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall trouble or distress or persecution or famine or any of these things? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I'm sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[7 : 30] So what God has done on our behalf through Jesus has to be our foundation for confidence in the Christian life. In the little while, even if we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper together, in the Lord's Supper we stop and we reflect and we remember everything Jesus secured for us, everything Jesus did on our behalf.

The Lord's Supper is this amazing picture. It points us to the reality of his death and everything that comes along with that, all the blessings and benefits we have through that death.

And in the eating and the drinking we are so mindful that nothing, nothing can come between us and God because of what Jesus has done for us. Nobody can snatch us out of his hand. No crisis in life can come between us and the Son of God who loves us and gave himself for us.

And so there's a huge amount of encouragement in this first point in Joshua's speech that God is a God who acts for his people. God fights for his people. But there's also a huge challenge for us this evening because God knows that as human beings we are so quick to slide into complacency and

self-reliance and forgetfulness.

God knows that his people are liable to wander and stray from him. David in Psalm 30 is a good example of this kind of self-reliance when things are going well, he says, as for me and my prosperity, I said I shall never be shaken.

[8 : 59] It's so easy for us when things are going well in life to forget the God who has done so much for us. It's easy for us to forget his salvation.

It's easy for us to forget the cost of Jesus' death. We must remember as a church, as St. Columbus, as the people of God today, everything God secured for us.

It's God who has acted for us in the gospel. But it's easy for us to think that it's all about us and our performance. But the Bible reminds us that it's God who turns a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. It's God who takes people out of darkness and into light. By his grace he chooses to use us as instruments and as tools.

But we have to remember that unless the Lord builds the house, the labors build in vain. So where is our confidence placed this evening? The first point in Joshua's final speech points the people to look at God as the one who has fought for his people, the one who brings his people the victory.

[10 : 01] Secondly, we're encouraged to think about the people who cling to their God, people who cling to their God. Look at verse 6 to verse 8. Therefore, he says, be very strong to keep and do all that's written in the book of the law of Moses, turning from it neither to the right nor to the left, that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you, or make mention of the names of their gods, but you shall cling to the Lord your God just as you have done to this day.

So in other words, if the emphasis of the first point was very much on what God has done for his people, the second point in the passage is to look at how God's people should respond and how God's people should live in light of what God has done and what God has said.

And one of the key themes we see running through the whole book of Joshua is the importance of obedience. And I wonder what we think of when we hear the word obedience this evening.

I think for many people in our world today, obedience conveys quite a negative sense. It sounds quite heavy. It sounds quite oppressive. Maybe it makes us think of God as some kind of distant or cruel taskmaster.

It sounds burdensome. But obedience in Joshua is presented to us as a response of love. And Joshua says to the people to cling to the Lord their God in verse 8, the word that's used there for cling is actually used first way back in Genesis for the bond between a husband and a wife.

[11 : 27] It's like to hold fast. The word speaks of permanence. Isaiah uses the same word to speak of metal that's been welded together.

Israel is pictured as the Lord's bride who clings to him. And so Joshua urges the people then to live faithfully for God, to obey the law, to remain loyal to him in the midst of all the unbelieving people around them.

But he does that in the context of this incredible relationship of love. Because in a marriage, a husband and a wife give everything to each other.

In a marriage, you don't just give the other person a one day a week acknowledgement that they exist. You give everything to them. And so Joshua says the people's obedience to the God who has given them so much is incredibly important.

And the language reflects the reality that it's going to be hard. Be very strong to keep and do all that's written in the book of the law, turning aside neither to the right nor to the left. It's something that requires strength.

[12 : 30] Be very strong, Joshua says, because God knows it's hard for us to live faithfully for him in a world that is not a world of rebellion.

One of the greatest enemies of faith we were thinking about a few weeks ago is the problem of our own forgetfulness. God knows that we're forgetful. The language that the passage uses of turning aside off the path is something we can resonate with.

There's so many things in life that seek to draw us away from living for God. One of the main problems God's people run into as the biblical story unfolds is not so much the threat of foreign nations and aggression from foreign rulers.

The problems come from the insight. The problems for Israel are internal. When you go into the very next book in the Bible, the book of Judges, you see these cycles of forgetfulness.

See a God who redeems his people, saves them, they live for him, they forget. They turn aside to the idols and false gods of the nations around them. And then judgment comes.

[13 : 36] God's people are incredibly forgetful. But the reality is that that same pitfall is there for us as Christians today. One of the greatest dangers in the Christian life is forgetting who we are as believers.

When we go about our lives in the busyness of work or the pressures of uni or family life and all the chaos in our lives, we can so easily forget who we are as God's children.

We need to remind ourselves and ground ourselves every day in the truth that our salvation is not a result of our own power or our own strength. Just like the people of God in Joshua's day, we need to remember that God acts on behalf of his people.

But Joshua does go on to highlight to us the dangers of compromising. He says if you turn back and cling to the remnants of the nations around you, you're going to have all kinds of problems.

In verse 12, it's the same word, cling, that appears again, sort of serving as a contrast of choices for them. In other words, he's saying to them, who are you going to serve?

[14 : 39] Who are you going to live for? The God who has given you all of this or the world around you? In chapter 24, in the next chapter, he goes on to emphasize this point.

He says, who are you going to serve, Israel? As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. So recall to be a people who cling to our God, who live for him, to give him our unwavering loyalty and allegiance, to hold fast to him like in a marriage.

And verse 11 ties together for us this idea of love and obedience. Joshua says, there be very careful to love the Lord your God.

One Old Testament scholar called Dale Ralph Davis commenting on this passage, he says it's not simply a question of loving the law, but of loving the law giver. If people love the law giver, they will seek to do what he wants.

Jesus in the New Testament, when he's asked to sum up the law, he says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

[15 : 42] So there's a strong connection between loving God and obeying God. He that loves me keeps my commands. So we've looked at the God who fights for his people, who acts on our behalf, the people who cling to our God.

Third and final part of Joshua's speech, we see the promises that never fail. We can have confidence because God is a God who is utterly faithful to his promises. Look at verse 14.

And now I'm about to go the way of all the earth. And you know in your hearts and your souls, all of you, that not one word of all the good things the Lord your God promised concerning you, not one word has failed, all have come to pass for you.

This is a key theme we've seen in the book of Joshua in this series. God is a God who makes and keeps promises. See God is absolutely committed to you, to his people.

He will absolutely do what he says. Few things I think in life can be as damaging or destructive to our relationship or to our confidence in another person as a broken promise, as someone who goes back on their word, and someone breaks a promise that can have a devastating effect on trust in our relationship.

[16 : 57] But we're presented with a God who is absolutely faithful to his promises. Way back in Genesis, God chose a man called Abraham, and he made this threefold promise to him.

He promised to give him a land, a new home. He promised to give him a people, a family to live in the land with, and he promised him a blessing through a relationship with God.

And now here they are in the land. What was a man and a small family has grown into a nation, and God has taken them and blessed them and kept his promises.

So Joshua is reminding the people at the end of his life that God is faithful. And sometimes all we can do as a believer is come back to God's promises.

Sometimes all we can do when we hear a devastating diagnosis or when we face the death of a loved one, a friend or a family member, when we're struggling with all the battles and pressures in our lives, sometimes all we can do is come back to God's promises.

[17 : 58] The Bible is absolutely full of his promises. He promises us that our salvation is secure in John chapter 10. He promises to give us a way out of temptation.

He promises to give us wisdom if we ask. He promises to finish the good work he has begun in us. The apostle Paul says that no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ. It is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us. He set his seal of ownership on us, and he put his spirit on our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. The amazing thing is the gospel reminds us that we can cling to Jesus today because he has set his seal of ownership on us. He has promised that he will always cling to you.

Hebrews chapter 13, he says this, I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. So we can say with confidence, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me?

[19 : 03] So we have confidence in the God who fights for us. We cling to him as his people, and we have confidence that he is faithful to his promises. The book of Joshua reminds us that God is the promise keeping God.

We can take God at his word. It may he enable us to cling to him this week in all that we do to ground ourselves in his words and in his promises, and to love him and live for him in all that we do. Let's pray. Lord God and Father, we do thank you and praise you this evening that you are a God who is utterly faithful to your people.

We thank you, Lord God, that not one word of your word will fail. We thank you, Father, that you are a God who will finish what you have started in us. We thank you, Father, that we can come to your word and we can trust in you absolutely.

Father, give us a confidence in you this week in all that we do. Give us confidence to live boldly as your people, to live for you and love you and obey you and serve you in every sphere of our lives.

[20 : 08] Help us, Lord God, this evening to know how loved we are through what you've done for us in Jesus. Help us as we take the Lord's supper together to reflect and to be so aware of the amazing privilege it is to call Jesus our Savior.

Lord, help us to adore you, help us to worship you. Father, we pray that you would, in everything, enable us to do it to your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.