

The God Who is Faithful

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[0 : 0 0] So this evening at St. Columbus, we're beginning a new series We're gonna be looking through the book of Joshua So if you have a Bible with you and you want to follow along and please have it open at page 178 where we read from Joshua and chapter 1 Excuse me But before we dig into the text of Joshua together I wonder if anyone here this evening has heard of something called the Edelman trust barometer I doubt it the Edelman trust barometer is it's a grand name It's a survey that takes place every year and it's something that tracks levels of trust within the UK And I'm a bit of a geek for stats and figures and surveys and stuff So I think it's really cool, but very briefly. I want to just highlight something that the Edelman trust barometer Found it's found that year on year trust in the UK is declining As a people we are apparently becoming more and more cynical and more and more mistrustful of others

According to the survey trust in politicians came in at 36% Trust in social media and news outlets and all sorts of things like that came in even lower And the point of the survey basically was that trust across the UK is falling and we know that I think I think it's hard In the political climate we live in to trust what people say Maybe we know in our own personal lives. We find it hard to trust people. Maybe we've experienced the the the damaging effects of a broken promise or a lack of trust in a relationship or within our family or amongst friends the Book of Joshua presents us with someone who is absolutely worthy of our trust One of the key points in the whole book of Joshua is that God is Absolutely trustworthy God is someone who always keeps his promises God is someone you can take at his word In chapter 21 towards the end of the book spoiler alert jumping head to the end

For verse 45 says this not one of all the Lord's good promises to Israel failed Everyone was fulfilled And this is a theme we're going to come back to time and time again in this series is that God is a God who makes promises and keeps promises God does not lie. There is no fake news with God. God has no hidden agenda God has no ulterior motives God does not deceive us and God cannot disappoint us like the people around us can Maybe you're here this evening and you find it. It's hard to trust God Maybe you're here this evening and you've trusted God's your entire life Or maybe you're here and at one point in your life you trusted God, but you found yourself grown distant and far away Well, wherever we're at this evening. I think we all need to be reminded of God's faithfulness of God's trustworthiness of God as who he is a person we can trust with our lives Now this evening really what we want to do is just just give an introduction to the series and we set the scene for

Joshua and what's going on in the book of Joshua It might be a book of the Bible that you know well You might know all the stories within it. It might be a book you don't know at all But hopefully together as we dig deep into Joshua We'll see more about who God is as the great promise keeper who we are as his people in response And how Joshua as God's chosen leader points us to what God has done for us through Jesus Christ So what is Joshua all about? Why is it included in our Bibles?

How is it relevant to our lives today as Christians? How do we read parts of the Old Testament like Joshua that at some level seem quite distant and detached from our experience in the 21st century?

[3 : 53] I think a good starting point is to know that God is the main character God is the main character in Joshua Now we might be tempted when we come to a book like this to think that Joshua Surely would be the main character in a book called Joshua If I told you that Harry Potter was not the main character in Harry Potter Or that John Wick was not the main character in John Wick or that Matilda was not the main character in Matilda You probably think I was crazy So we come to a book called Joshua and we have to think surely it's all about Joshua But I think our starting point has to be that Joshua is a book all about God And what we're going to do in this series over the next few weeks is look at different aspects of what the story of Joshua teaches us about God Different aspects of God's character who he is and what God has done And I think that way of looking at the Old Testament is really helpful for us because sometimes we open our Bibles And we go to a book in the Old Testament and our first thought is where am I in this?

What does this say to me in my experience today? But I think if we read our Bibles first and foremost with the understanding that God is the main character The first question we have to ask is what does this tell me about God?

What does Joshua tell us about who God is what God has done and how does that point forward to the climax of his plans in Jesus? Christ and from there. How does that speak to us as Christians?

So let's look this evening just briefly at the opening verses of Joshua the first scene chapter 1 verse 1 And there's two points I want to raise this evening as we look at Joshua together First of all that God promises his people a new home God promises his people a new home and then secondly God equips his people to get there So God brings us home So first point God promises his people a new home read again from verse 1 After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord the Lord said to Joshua son of none Moses my servant is dead now therefore go over this Jordan you and all this people into the land I'm giving you to the people of Israel every place the soul of your feet 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 Euphrates all the land of the Hittites to the great sea Toward the going down to the sun going down to 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 I will not forsake you be strong and courageous for you shall cause this people to inherit the land I swore to their fathers to give them So right at the start of Joshua the very first scene we find God's people right on the verge of entering the promised land And I think for us to understand what's going to happen in this book It's helpful for us to to reflect very briefly on the story so far If you go right the way back to the start of the Bible in Genesis We're told how God's created a good world a world free from evil and sin and suffering and pain and death He's created a world for human beings to enjoy a relationship with him and with each other and Then in Genesis C we read about the fall where human beings Mess things up and that perfect world is tainted and distorted by sin And the rest of the book then and the rest of the Bible really is God's amazing plan to rescue and to redeem and to restore what was lost

[7 : 28] And a really important part in Genesis is in chapter 12 where God goes to a man called Abraham And chooses him and says to him. I'm going to make some amazing promises to you He promises to give him a place to live He promises Abraham there'll be a people to live there and he promises a blessing and relationship with God to enjoy And the important part for us as we study Joshua is to have that first promise in mind a place to live God has promised a people a place to live So this is the key thing as we as we go into Joshua together the promise of a home for God's people And I wonder this evening for you what the word home and what kind of memories or thoughts that conjures up I think the word home can be quite a comforting word at times I've just spent a few days at home up north near Inverness and every time I go up 39 I begin to get this sense of home where I can see the Kessok bridge I can see the Kessok bridge and I know I'm almost home And home can bring up wonderful memories memories of family and friends and loved ones. Maybe it's a place a geographical place that you're attached to

And home can be a comforting thought But God's people here have spent so long homeless They've been in slavery in Egypt Then God brings them up out of Egypt and takes them towards this new home. He's promised them And then everything went wrong just as they were about to enter the land Towards the end of the last book they they doubt that God can do what he said They doubt that God can actually take them into this land And so that generation spent 40 years wandering around in the wilderness But now as we go into Joshua together, we're almost there That goes 40 years up. Moses has passed away. Joshua is the new leader. He's been commissioned. It's a new generation and God says We're going into the land And if we take a step back from Joshua itself, we see that the promise of a home for God's people is throughout scripture Excuse me For God's people in Joshua, it's primarily about the land of Canaan. It's a geographical land

But as that promise is developed as God's redemptive purposes Unfold in the Bible That hope develops and for us today the hope of a home of a land for God's people Comes to a climax in the New Testament Jesus says in John chapter 14 My father's house has many rooms if that were not so would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am Revelation speaks of that hope as a new heavens and a new earth a place where God will dwell with his people forever And verse 4 of chapter 21 says he will wipe away every tear from our eyes There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain First Peter picks up on that the language of promise when he speaks about this as an inheritance that's been kept for us An inheritance that's kept in heaven for us I imagine that none of us here this evening will have to wander around in a desert for 40 years

But we all have to face up to the reality of death Death is a sobering reality for every single human being There's a there's a finality to death that we all have to face up to And if if if we're here this evening and we're not a believer in Jesus we have to think about well, where where are we going?

After all the busyness and the chaos of life. What is at the end for us? As Christians we know that we can focus in on this absolute certainty of God's promise The promise of a home for his people The sad case for many people in our country today is that that grief is something to be faced without hope We reify and face it with sentimentality or pragmatism or a stiff upper lip But death is an enemy to which there is no answer The Bible tells us that Christians can grieve differently We grieve as those who have hope First Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 13 Paul says brothers and sisters We do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death so that you do not grieve like the rest of humanity who have no hope For we believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him God promises us a new home A home with him in eternity

[12 : 04] Secondly the second thing we see in Joshua is that God equips his people to get there We see that in Joshua chapter 1 in two ways. First of all God equips his people with his presence Read verse 5 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 nor will I forsake you Now in the first instance these are words that are spoken to Joshua as an individual Here in chapter 1 Joshua is being commissioned for the huge task of leading God's people He's been given this responsibility of taking them over the Jordan into the land to battle with their enemies and to claim the land as their own So this promise God has given is primarily to Joshua to strengthen him and to encourage him for what lies ahead But at the same time in the gospel God speaks these words to us It's a promise to us Hebrews chapter 13 picks up on these verses. It says God has said this never will I leave you never will I forsake you

So we say with confidence the Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid What can mere mortals do to me? You see the presence of God in the Christian life is the greatest source of strength and courage In our Christian lives we have to face all manner of difficulty and opposition It might not be an army like in Joshua, but we all have to face grief and pain and anxiety and stress and the burdens and responsibilities and pressures of our lives So the presence of God is an enormous source of strength and courage You see the reality is that the journey is hard That's true for God's people in Joshua and it's true for us today Chapter one alone God says to his people four times be strong and courageous be strong and courageous The implication clearly is that their journey is going to be difficult There will be hurdles and challenges and opposition and enemies So God says be strong and courageous because I am with you

And this is a consistent promise throughout scripture That God promises to be with you To be with his people I think for many people the review of Christianity is one of a God who is cold and distant and detached and far away and removed from all of our pressures and burdens of life But God promises to be with his people It's helpful as well I think to look at the language in Chapter one of Joshua verse two God speaks about the land. He says he wants to be with his people And verse two God speaks about the land. He says here that I am giving to them And in the very next verse in verse three God says every place that the soul of your foot will tread upon I have given to you Do you notice the grammar there? The tenses change There's an element of now and not yet It's almost as if they've been given the title deeds to the land but they've yet to take up residency And I think in much the same way for us as Christians

You know, we know that our citizenship is elsewhere Paul says in Philippians chapter three our citizenship is in heaven But at the same time we are exiles. We are strangers. We are sojourners here in this life The Bible often puts the Christian life into the language of a journey. It says we are travelers. We're pilgrims When me and my brothers were growing up and we would go away on family holidays mum and dad would often drive I admire them for that because we were not well behaved And we would so often be impatient. We would so often be asking are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet?

How much longer? We've probably just left the house at that point Um, but we can all resonate with with with that and we can feel sometimes that this journey of life is hard It's long. It's arduous So often we're battling with discouragement and doubt and despair and grief and fear and tiredness Sometimes we want to say to God are we there yet? How much longer?

[16 : 18] See as believers in Jesus Christ the journey can be hard, but God promises to be with us Why can we be strong and courageous in the face of all of that kind of challenge because God is with us?

Verse nine goes on to repeat this be strong and courageous Do not be frightened. Do not be dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go So God equips his people for the journey with his presence Secondly God equips his people with his word look at verse seven He says being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded to you Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left that you may have good success wherever you go The book of the law shall not depart from your mouth But you shall meditate on it day and night Excuse me so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it For then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success In other words God has given his word his book of the law his word the Bible to his people So they may know how to live in response to what he has done You see another great hurdle for God's people on this journey Both in Joshua's timing in our own lives is not just the suffering and the difficulties we face

But it's temptation It's the constant danger of being drawn away Of being distracted of being Going off the path And so God equips his people not only with his presence, but with his word Sometimes we have to find ourselves in our lives at a point where all we can do is go to God's word All we can do is latch on to his promises We can come to a God who is faithful even when our faith is at its weakest A God who is constant A God who does not change The Bible is full of God's promises He promises to give us wisdom if we ask in James chapter 1 He promises to provide us a way out of temptation 1 Corinthians 10 He promises us that our salvation is secure no matter what He promises never to leave us nor forsake us He promises to finish the good work that he has begun in you And lastly he promises to return So as God equips his people for the journey

He gives us these promises in his word So over a Christian here this evening whatever is happening in our lives Whatever difficulties we're facing we know that God is with us That is the reality However dark and bleak your life might seem However hopeless your situation might feel You have the most amazing promises in God's word Promises you can hold to and cling to in the storms of life In a little while we're going to sing a final song And I thought it would be good just to think about some of the words that we're going to sing And just to reflect on them before we sing them The last verse of the song Christ is Mine Forevermore Goes like this It says minor days here as a stranger Pilgrim on a night Pilgrim on a narrow way One with Christ I will encounter Harsh hatred for his name But mine is armor for this battle Strong enough to last the war And he has said he will deliver safely to the golden shore And I think that really captures so much of the Christian life

It reminds us that you don't have to be a hero You don't have to be a heroine It's interesting that in the Bible Even the name Joshua The Greek for Joshua is Jesus The Lord saves Means that we don't have to be the hero All we have to do is trust in the hero The hero that God has provided for us And that he will do as he has promised And you see that has huge implications for our life today as Christians Because what we look forward to in the future What we believe about the future Has a huge impact on life in the present And that's true for everyone Whether you're a Christian here this evening or not What you believe about the future Or what you'd read about the future Has an impact on the present And there's an example you've probably heard before Here in St. Columbus Imagine that you give two people the exact same job to do for a week Maybe it's something boring on Monday and like stacking chairs You tell the first person who's doing this job That at the end of it they're going to receive 10 million pounds It's incredible

[20 : 42] You tell the second person they might receive something And the answer is obvious Of course they won't The first person knows there's something amazing Promised to them waiting at the end The second person doesn't know Maybe, maybe not A promise about the future can radically impact life in the present And as we put our faith and our hope and our trust In what God promises us Regarding our faith and our faith And the answer is obvious The first person knows there's something amazing Promised to them waiting at the end The second person doesn't know Regarding our future In doing that we are strengthened And encouraged in our battles today Our battles against sin and temptation We are encouraged to live lives that reflect our trust in those promises It's one of the unique things I think about Christianity A lot of other religions and worldviews and philosophies Are always really concentrated on what if Maybe I've done enough Maybe I've been a good enough person They're very much dependent on our performance

Have I done enough to secure a place in whatever afterlife is waiting for me We trust that God has done it for us And we trust in his promises This is what Paul says in the New Testament In 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 20 He says, for no matter how many promises God has made They are yes in Christ Now it is God who makes both us and you stand for us And you stand firm in Christ He anointed us He set his seal of ownership on us And he put his spirit in our hearts As a deposit guaranteeing what is to come So the key point really that we're saying here And the one we'll come back to again and again in this series Is that God is faithful to his promises You can take God at his word The God who promises to give us a new home And the God who equips us to get there Be strong and courageous

Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go Let's pray together Lord our God, our loving Father We come to you this evening as we worship you and as we praise you And we want to thank you for the amazing promises you have given us in your word We thank you that in Joshua we see a God who promises to take his people into the promised land We thank you Lord God That you are a God who is faithful and consistent We thank you Lord that we can depend on you and trust in you We thank you too Father that you've promised us that you will get us home Father help us to trust in you more Help us to lean on you Help us to cling to you in the storms of our lives Help us to know how loved we are And help us Lord in the week to come to live for you And to reflect our trust in you in all that we do

And help us to bring glory to you in Jesus' name Amen