

Receiving Your Inheritance

Messages from the Book of Joshua

Message 1

A Home for God's People

Genesis 2:7-17; 3:22-24; 12:1-3; 28:13-15; 50:24-26;
Exodus 1:6-14; 3:7-10; 12:29-42; Deuteronomy 31:1-8

Introduction

Here we are, the first day of a new semester. Are you ready to go? I suppose we all have spent the past four weeks at home, and I bet you were glad to get there after a grueling week and a half of finals. Lehigh can be fun (when you're not taking finals), but there is nothing like home – your Mom and Dad, siblings and friends, home cooked meals, and your own bed. I remember when I was in college how nice it was to go home. I really enjoyed the university. My courses were interesting, my living arrangements were pleasant, and I had good Christian friends. But there was nothing like going home. We lived on a farm, and it was relaxing to climb up on a tractor and spend the day in the fields, then come in to a dinner of roast beef or steak or pork chops. There was always plenty of meat, and whenever we ran low, we brought a steer in from the herd and replenished the freezer. Home is different for me now, but it's still the best place to be. Last week the Ministry Team had a retreat for three days. It was a wonderful time, but I was glad to get home to my wife and children and familiar surroundings.

I hope you were glad to get home last month, and had a good time while there. But there are some who do not have this opportunity. Some people have no home, and others find home so miserable, they prefer to be elsewhere. One of the most touching scenes in "A Christmas Carol", the short story by Charles Dickens, comes during the visit of the ghost of Christmas past. This ghost gives us an account of the making of a miser, as we catch scenes from different periods in Scrooge's life. The one I find so moving is when he is a boy at boarding school. All the other children had gone home, but Scrooge was left behind, to face Christmas alone. But just when it seems he will be abandoned for this glad season, his sister arrives. She says, "I've come to take you home. Home! Father's so much kinder now." And in that brief dialog is revealed the accumulated pain of years of abuse and neglect by a little boy's father. Wouldn't it tear your heart if you had no home to return to, or you were afraid to go home to your father ?

One of the main themes – perhaps *the* main theme of the book of Joshua is going home. God's people had been homeless for over 400 years, and now, finally, they were going home. There are other themes as well. It is about – can you guess? – Joshua! This book shows us a great man, a man of godly character. It is also about a military campaign. This may be really exciting to some of you, and others may find it distasteful, but the blood and guts of war are part of this book. And finally, Joshua is also about Christ. He is visible only once, but His presence is behind everything that happens.

Joshua is a book about the history of God's people, the Israelites, and before we plunge into the book itself, we want to review how the Israelites got to this place. It all begins, appropriately enough, in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, whose name means "beginning". Turn to Genesis 2:7 and let's read a few verses.

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now a river went out of Eden to water the

garden, and from there it parted and became four river heads. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates. Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Genesis 2:7-17

This is the second, more detailed account of God's creation of man, and in it we see that God also made him a home. The Garden of Eden was a beautiful home, an amazing home for Adam and Eve. It was full of wonderful, shady trees that were beautiful as well as tasty. There were pleasant streams running through the garden, which led to lands rich with gold and gems. And to top it off, there was the tree of life, which would sustain man forever.

I love nature. I love forests and meadows and gardens. One of my greatest pleasures in going home was the opportunity to wander over the 230 acres of our farm, basking in the peacefulness of the woods and pastures and streams. Most of us like the outdoors, which is why national forests and city parks are so vital to our concept of well-being. This was the perfect garden. God designed and planted it Himself, and it has never been equaled since. It was pure bliss for Adam and Eve to live there.

Tragically, they didn't enjoy it for long. In blatant rebellion against God's explicit command, they ate from the forbidden tree. Turn to chapter 3, verse 22, and let's read the consequences of their act.

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" -- therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 3:22-24

God made the garden for Adam, and He made Adam as the caretaker of the garden. But Adam turned out to be an unfaithful servant. Instead of caring for the garden, as commanded, he attempted to exploit it for his own pleasure, and was expelled. Some children's Bible story books illustrate this showing Adam and Eve weeping, heads bowed in shame, as the angel drives them out into the wilderness. For although the whole world was good, having been created by God – it was uncultivated. Trees, shrubs, and herbs were scattered randomly about. In the garden-home there was food readily available, but now it took hard work to gather food to sustain themselves. Furthermore, since Adam rebelled against his Lord, now the earth rebelled against him. Farming would be miserable toil. The crowning sorrow of it all was the presence of the angel at the entrance to the garden. Adam lived for 930 years. For 930 years, he woke up to see the garden, barricaded against him and his children because of his sin. Adam was homeless. Like a vagabond cast out into the street, Adam could only look longingly in the door of the home he would never enter again.

But the story doesn't end there. It could have, but God is kind and merciful. God was compassionate on Adam, even though he sinned willfully, and God announced that He would put things right someday. A few verses earlier in chapter 3 God promised to send a deliverer to rescue His people. Speaking to the serpent which had deceived Eve, God said, "*And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And*

between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.” (v. 15)
Someday God will crush the head of the serpent and return His people to their home.

I think that Adam and Eve were faithful to God all their lives, but some of their children were not. Cain, their oldest son, killed his brother Abel, and Lamech, a later descendent, established a violent and bloody society. Mankind descended into a moral cesspool until God destroyed everyone but Noah and his family in a worldwide flood. But then Noah’s descendants also turned away from God. Out of the sinfulness of human society God called a man, and gave him a most remarkable promise. Turn to chapter 12 of Genesis and let’s read what God said to Abraham.

Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12:1-3

Do you see what God is doing here? He is promising a home to Abraham! God has a land somewhere for Abraham to live in. It is huge, because it will accommodate a large nation of people. Furthermore, God promises to bless Abraham. And not only Abraham, but the whole world! God is beginning to roll back the curse on the earth that Adam’s sin provoked! This is a marvelous promise, and Abraham must have been completely overwhelmed by the magnitude of God’s love toward him.

There was a catch, however. Abraham would have to leave his present home. For while mankind had been homeless when God cast Adam and Eve out of the garden, man had in the meantime made homes for himself. The problem is that the homes man built did not have God’s word as their foundation, so they were idolatrous. They were counterfeit homes. Adam’s birthplace, the city of Ur in Mesopotamia, was a rich, prosperous city. It was a pleasant place to live – unless you worshiped God – for the whole city was devoted to idolatry. You see, this was the whole point of the garden. In His house, God demands complete obedience to His Word. Partial obedience is not good enough. That’s what got Adam and Eve kicked out. And this is true of any society. Partial obedience to God is not good enough. Any society that does not follow God perfectly will fall – so all societies eventually fall.

God was promising something better for Abraham. God was promising a lasting home. But in order to get it, he would have to turn his back on the beautiful, comfortable, and idolatrous home in which he was born. What would you do? Would you give up everything you have in order to obey God? Or would you try to obey God in a godless home? Genesis tells the story of Abraham’s relatives and their failed attempt to live in comfort and please God too. Lot is the most famous example. Lot moved into the exciting city of Sodom in the lush Jordan river valley. He tried to serve God while living a life of comfort and pleasure. Lot would not willingly give up pleasure and comfort, but in the end he lost everything – his wife, his home, his wealth, his city, and his dignity. He died a vagabond in the mountains where he lived incestuously with his daughters. You can’t play games with God. When He calls you to obedience, don’t go half-way. You could lose a lot more than your current pleasures.

Abraham listened to God’s call, and God led him to the land of Canaan. Abraham had a son, but the he never got the land God promised. I think I would conclude that God had gyped me, but Abraham didn’t. He figured that God would give the land to his son, Isaac. Isaac clung to God’s promise and had two sons. Jacob was designated as the one to receive the promise, and God spoke to him, renewing the promise. Turn to Genesis 28:13-15, and let’s read what God said to him as he was traveling to the land of his ancestors.

And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

Genesis 28:13-14

Although decades had passed, and Jacob was Abraham's grandson, God's promise held firm. Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob lived all their lives in tents – nomads with no home. But God assured Jacob that the very ground on which he was lying that night would be his and his children's. Furthermore, this is not some idle, far-off idea, but God promises to be present with Jacob and to accomplish this personally.

Jacob went to Mesopotamia, where he found a wife (two, actually), had children, and amassed considerable wealth. After twenty years he returned to the land of Canaan a prosperous farmer, yet still he lived in tents. Jacob was tested with many troubles, the greatest of which were the loss of his beloved wife and his youngest son, Joseph. You should read the account of Jacob's life. It is a real tear-jerker. But he still trusted in God to fulfill his promise. Eventually Canaan was hit with a terrible famine and everyone had to go to Egypt for food. Imagine Jacob's astonishment to find that the son which he thought dead was actually the ruler of Egypt! With God's blessing, Jacob moved his whole family to Egypt where they were well provided for by Joseph. But they never forgot that they were not at home. Canaan was their home, and they trusted God to take them there. On his deathbed Joseph made his brothers promise to take his bones with them when God came to lead them home.

And Joseph said to his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Genesis 50:24-26

If there had been any doubt about Egypt, there came a day when it became clear that the Israelites could not remain there. I suppose that many of Jacob's descendants became quite comfortable in Egypt, but that was not the home God promised them. After Joseph died the Egyptians turned on his countrymen and brutally mistreated them. Turning to the Book of Exodus, we read in chapter 1:6-14.

And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation. But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them. Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage -- in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor.

Exodus 1:6-13

Notice how God is fulfilling His promise. Abraham's descendants multiplied greatly, just as He had said. But the result of this blessing was further trouble. The more the Israelites grew, the more the Egyptians mistrusted them. As their plight became more and more terrible, God's people cried out to Him all the more for relief. God was not unaware of their trouble, and in time He called Moses to be His instrument of deliverance. In chapter 3, verses 7-10 we read...

And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

Exodus 3:7-10

The Egyptians were not willing to loose their slave labor, and resisted. God used Moses to send 9 terrible plagues upon the land. The country was ravaged, the economy was devastated, but still the Egyptians clung to their slave force. Finally God sent one last plague which terrorized the whole nation. Let's read this story in Exodus chapter 12, beginning in verse 29.

And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also." And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders. Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds -- a great deal of livestock. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves. Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years -- on that very same day -- it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This is that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.

Exodus 12:29-42

Israel was free! They left Egypt with the blessing of Pharaoh, and even took the treasure of the nation with them as well. Soon after they left Pharaoh gathered his army and pursued them, but God destroyed the whole Egyptians army by drowning them in the sea. Israel's enemies were dead.

Israel journeyed on toward Canaan, but when they arrived there, their nerve failed. Giants lived in that land, and they were afraid to enter, in spite of God's promise to give them victory. The Israelites saw God miraculously defeat the whole Egyptian army, but they did not trust Him to give them victory over the giants. So God decreed that those people would never enter the promised land. Forty years they wandered in circles in the desert. God provided for them all that time. They always had food and water, clothing and shelter. They spent their whole lives waiting to die. Finally every adult Israelite who left Egypt had died except Joshua and Caleb. Joshua and Caleb were the only Israelites who advocated fighting the giants, and for their faithfulness God granted them the privilege of entering the homeland.

At last the time came to go home.

Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. And he said to them: "I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the LORD has said to me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan.' The LORD your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the LORD has said. And the LORD will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land, when He destroyed them. The LORD will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you." Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, He is the one who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed."

Deuteronomy 31:1-8

Jesus promised the meek will inherit the earth
Jesus is providing a place for you
He will keep His promise – will you keep yours?

C. David Green
Lehigh University
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