

# Receiving Your Inheritance

## Messages from the Book of Joshua

Message 11

### *Principles for Life*

Joshua 23:1-16

#### ***Introduction***

We're almost at the end of our studies in the book of Joshua. It's a great book. It's one of the favorite books of the Bible, and I think that's because it has a happy ending. Joshua opens uneasily, reminding us that Moses, the superhero of Israel is dead. Joshua is presented, the chosen but untested successor. Over and over he is urged to be strong and courageous, to obey fully God's word – creating suspense about the final outcome. The tension mounts as we follow the spies into Jericho, and wonder if these will be more faithful than the first group of spies 40 years earlier. The spies narrowly escape, only by making a questionable alliance with a Canaanite prostitute. Then comes the awesome crossing of the Jordan River. Like Moses a generation before, Joshua rolls back the turbulent flood waters and the whole nation – millions of men, women, children, and animals – cross safely on dry ground. The people lie helplessly exposed as they were circumcised, but no enemy attacks. It's the calm before the storm. Jericho is Israel's first victim. Then disaster strikes, as Israel is routed by a small town. Is this the end? Will their conquest of Canaan be limited to one city? God brings Joshua to face the problem – sin in the camp. The sinful family is removed, and the march goes on. But right away another setback hits. Israel forgets to seek God's guidance, and they make a foolish treaty with a neighboring city. Again, God helps them recover and get back on track. From here on it is a solid string of successes. Joshua leads a southern campaign followed by a northern campaign, and totally annihilates all the Canaanite armies. So complete is the victory, the Canaanites never again mount a large-scale war.

All along Joshua remembered the charge given him at the beginning. In everything he did Joshua sought to obey God's word fully. He didn't try to cut corners or give in to fear, but steadily did all God commanded. After the Canaanite armies were defeated, Joshua carried out God's commands for dividing the land and followed every detail. And sure enough, God kept all His promises. Chapter 21, concluded, "So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers...Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass." (vv. 43-45) All came to pass. Every promise was kept, and Israel had rest in their own land at last. So Joshua is a great story. It has suspense, tension, victories and setbacks, but in the end Joshua wins.

Now Joshua is old – too old to fight, and waning in strength. Joshua looks back on his life and at all God has done for him. Soon he will die, but before then, he wants to be sure those left behind will be clear about what has happened during his lifetime, and understand its significance. So Joshua calls the nation together in a great assembly and gives them his reminiscences. My Bible labels this chapter "Joshua's Farewell Address", and that is a fair title. But the content of Joshua's message is more like a reflection on the past – a recapitulation, or a summary and conclusion. Joshua reminds the people what happened and how it applies to them now. He is doing all he can to leave Israel in good shape before he dies. His life was a huge success, and he wants Israel's success to continue. As we study this chapter, we will see the same principles for success apply to us.

#### ***Joshua's Reminiscence***

Let's look first at two reminders Joshua gave Israel. He reminded them that God fought for them (v. 3) and that God kept His promises to them (v. 5). God had promised to go before Israel and drive out the

Canaanites. In reality this was God's war. The Canaanites had become so revolting in their sin, God finally moved to exterminate them. Israel was simply His instrument of justice. Chapter after chapter reported that God fought for His people. He broke down Jericho's walls, He sent the deadly hail, He made the sun stand still – everything Israel did was accompanied by God's mighty power. Over and over we are told that God kept His promises – the promise to fight for them; the promise of houses, land, and farms; and the promise of rest. The reason Joshua is reminding Israel that God fought for them and kept His promises is so they would continue to trust Him. The fighting is not completely over. There are pockets of Canaanites to be wiped out. Israel could not get lazy. She must remember to trust God and fight these battles.

Joshua followed his reminders with three exhortations. First he urged them to obey God's law. Did you notice *how* he wanted them to obey? Courageously, and thoroughly – just as he had been urged in the beginning of the book. No half-hearted obedience, but energetic, diligent, careful study and application of all God had commanded. Then Joshua commanded them to worship only the Lord (7-8). In this he is following the path of his mentor, Moses. This issue was not brought before Joshua himself, because it was not a particular problem while the nation was at war. Now, as they settle down in a land that had been saturated with idol worship, Joshua realized that idolatry will be a major temptation. So as Moses did in *his* final words, Joshua stressed the necessity of worshiping only the true God. A drowsy, lethargic sort of worship will never do, but the Israelites must “hold fast”, cling to God. They cannot let anything come between them and God. Third, Joshua urged Israel to love the Lord only (11-12). This is the capstone of his exhortations. In light of all that God has done for them, considering God's faithfulness to Israel, it would be criminal, it would be stupid to do anything else. And Joshua makes a particular application to Israel in her new situation as a settled nation. If she is to love God only, she will refuse to intermarry with the surrounding nations. This is not because Israel, or God, is racist or ethnocentric. It is because these nations are hostile toward God and morally perverted. Furthermore, marriage is a covenant, a joining of two families. It is impossible to be faithful to God and faithful to His enemy at the same time. Faithfulness to an unbelieving wife is, by definition, unfaithfulness to God. And after all God did for them, the Israelites should have the common decency to love God.

The end of Joshua's message is a solemn warning. If Israel is careless, if she takes these commands casually – if she engages in a little idol worship, if she indulges in a little intermarriage – God will turn against her. Joshua offers as proof, the promises of God. God promised to bless Israel, and He did. God also promises to destroy Israel if they disobey, and He will. God keeps all His promises. So if you do not obey His word, be afraid, be very afraid – for you will die.

### ***The Promises Today***

Joshua was a huge success. There were a few minor setbacks, but everything he did turned out well. At the end of his life he could look back and say that he did everything he was called to do. Would you like to be able to do that? Would you like to be able to look back when you are 70 or 80 years old and say that your life was a success? Everything you were supposed to do is complete? How about this semester? Would you like to be able to look back over this semester and say you finished all your work and it was a success? Or what about today? Wouldn't it be great if by bedtime you could say you succeeded in all your tasks? Well, even Joshua had some bad days! But you see there is a principle here for successful living. How can we live like that? How can our lives be a success? How can we escape the rat race? How can we avoid failure? How can we be a success?

The principles in Joshua are eternal. All people everywhere can find success by remembering, obeying, and heeding. The key is to remember God's promises and presence, obey His word and cling to Him, and heed His warning. The promises in Joshua are specifically directed to him and his situation, but

they are timeless in application. As I was thinking about this I turned to the Psalms, and the first page that fell open showed psalm 18.

*I will love You, O LORD, my strength.  
The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;  
My God, my strength, in whom I will trust;  
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.  
I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised;  
So shall I be saved from my enemies.                      Psalm 18:1-3*

This psalm praises God for His strength and reliability. You are as safe with Him as in a castle made of rock. He will protect you, He will fight for you, He will save you. The psalm continues by describing how God rescued David, the writer, from all his enemies. It ends saying,

*It is God who avenges me,  
And subdues the peoples under me;  
He delivers me from my enemies.  
You also lift me up above those who rise against me;  
You have delivered me from the violent man.  
Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the Gentiles,  
And sing praises to Your name.                      Psalm 18:47-49*

This is David speaking of his own deliverance, but the psalm is a song for all God's people. David, like Joshua, is not unique in this regard. They are examples of the way God treats *all* His people.

You see, the point here is that life is tough sometimes. Even brutal. You may face impossible problems. Obedience to God may mean severe sacrifice. Remember Job. Faithfulness to God cost him everything – his wealth, his family, even his health. God may order you to become a missionary. He may use you to minister to the poor and hurting. He may give you a difficult life. You may look around and wonder where God is. Maybe now God will bring into your life other students who are desperately needy and require your time. Maybe you will be called to befriend unpleasant people. Maybe you will need to take a stand for Christ in your class. But God is with you. You can trust God's promises. If God made Joshua a success, He can do the same for you. If God fought for Israel, He will fight for you, too. God is with you in all your struggles, and He will see you through.

But this is a conditional promise. God will grant you success when you are faithful to Him. Remember the defeat at Ai? When Joshua didn't obey God, he didn't succeed. Every book of the Bible urges us to obey God. Let's return to the Psalms for a minute. Psalm 1 says this:

*Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.  
He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose  
leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.  
The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.                      Psalm 1:1-4*

The key idea here is the Law of the Lord. The blessed man delights in it and meditates in it. This is not passive obedience, but eager, enthusiastic obedience. Whoever obeys God is blessed. The others are driven away like worthless husks. Again these are eternal principles. Success in life requires obedience to

God's word, worshiping Him alone, and loving Him above all else. Do these things and you will succeed.

Along with the promise comes the threat. Were you hoping I would skip that part? We don't like to think about such unpleasantness. We like to think about God's love and promises. But I would be unfaithful to God and to you if I proclaimed the positive and ignored the negative. The sober truth is that God will destroy the disobedient. Psalm 1 continues,

*Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.  
For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the ungodly shall perish. Psalm 1:5-6*

The ungodly shall perish. Folks, that's your friends, your roommates, your family – that's you, if you drift through life without following God wholeheartedly. In the judgment you will be found guilty, and condemned to eternal destruction. This is not a prediction. It's a warning. Listen! Don't mess around with God!

### ***Christ the Ultimate Joshua***

The name Joshua means "God saves". When God sent Gabriel to announce to Mary that she would bear a son who would save His people from their sins, He gave the baby the name "Jesus". Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua. It means God saves. Jesus came to save us, just like Joshua. Jesus is the ultimate Joshua. Just as Joshua gave Israel her earthly inheritance, so Jesus gives us our eternal inheritance. Just as Israel tried and failed to take Canaan on her own, but succeeded through Joshua – so we fail to please God on our own, but succeed through Jesus.

Our focus tonight has been entirely on your obedience to God – the blessing that comes with obedience, and the curse that accompanies disobedience. It wasn't my idea – I'm just trying to teach this text faithfully. So by now some of you may be getting the idea that life will be good if you do what God requires. Others of you may be thinking that such obedience is impossible. You have tried it before. You tried and tried to please God, but you keep falling into sin. Maybe you feel like giving up. Maybe you are doomed to a life of failure.

Here is where Christ enters the picture. Jesus saves us from both the guilt of sin and the power of sin. He lived a perfect life and died in our place. This took care of the guilt of your sin. Then He rose from the dead and now lives among us. He gives us power to obey God. You see, God demands obedience. You saw what happened when Israel let sin in the camp. They failed. If you think you are going to get by on partial obedience, you are dead wrong – as wrong as the Israelites! But Christ solves the obedience problem for us in two ways. He erases the guilt of our disobedience. That means that God does not punish our sins. He punished Christ, and that's all the punishment there is for us. Christ also solves the obedience problem by staying with us. He is present with us to help us obey. I think the most comforting scripture of all is Mt. 28:20 where Jesus says, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

### ***Life and Death***

Ultimately, the biggest theme of chapter 23 and of the whole book of Joshua looks back to Genesis and forward to Revelation. The question before Adam and Eve was whether they would obey and live, or disobey and die. Joshua could obey and live, or disobey and die. Rahab could obey the true God and live, or disobey and die. Achan could obey and live, or disobey and die. And in the end, we see all those who obeyed alive with God, and the disobedient cast into hell. The real issue of life isn't success after all, but life itself. Jesus exchanged his life for ours, so we who were dead now live. But only if you believe in Him.

This is the gospel. You can have far, far more than success. You can trade your miserable dead existence for real, vibrant life by trusting Jesus. When you do, all those promises we mentioned are yours for good. But if you don't believe and trust Jesus, the threat is for you. You have nothing to look forward to but to perish. The gospel is a great deal. Don't settle for success. Go for *life*. Then you will succeed, too.

C. David Green  
Lehigh University  
April 16, 2002