

Joshua 23 "Joshua passes the baton"

Final words... The last thing you have to say should be your most important words. They may be disparaging, as in the case of Karl Marx, who is said to have told his housekeeper, sitting at his bedside, eager to record his last pearls of posterity, *"Last words are for fools who haven't said enough."*

Sometimes they are wasted by criminals on death row, here are some

1. George Harris Executed in Missouri on September 13, 2000 for a murder. *"Somebody needs to kill my trial attorney."*
2. Jeffrey Matthews Executed in Oklahoma on January 11, 2011 *"I think that governor's phone is broke. He hadn't called yet."*
3. Clarence Ray Allen Executed in California on January 17, 2006 for 3 murders. *"My last words will be, 'Hoka hey, it's a good day to die.'..."*

Sometimes they are tragicomic, like those of General John Sedgwick, a Union commander killed in battle during the American Civil War in 1864, who said to his aid as he surveyed the enemy lines, *"They couldn't hit an elephant at this distance."* But the last words, or farewell speeches, of the Bible have much more serious content and far deeper significance. One has only to think of the final speeches of Jacob, Moses, or David for the point to be clear, and indeed John devotes chapter 13-17 of his Gospel to the last words of the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed. UNITY... *I think mine will be... "I told you I was sick".* **PRAY**

Stand with me... Joshua 23 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. **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. **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. **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, **8** but you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day. **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. **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. **14** “Behold, this day *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. **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.”

All right let us break this amazing chapter down. **23** 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. *Joshua could say, with Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim 4:7).* **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.

Verse 29 of Chapter 24 tells us that Joshua died at the **age of 110**. Assuming that he and Caleb were of similar age, we are probably looking at 20 to 30 years now since Israel first set foot in the land and set up the 12 memorial stones at Gilgal.

So... Joshua, in his old age, gathers the leadership of Israel together to give them a farewell address, to communicate to them the things that are, to his heart, the most important for them to hear. He is concerned with the **passing of the baton** to reliable successors and to do it well by passing on his God-given insights to the leaders of the nation.

Joshua can't, as a practical matter, speak to the whole nation, so he speaks to the leaders: elders, heads, judges, and officers. He can reach the entire nation by communicating well to the leaders. Final board meeting.

It is very pastoral, and it seeks to alert the leaders and bring them face-to-face with Joshua's concerns, using lessons from the past to secure a warm and godly orientation toward the future.

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. **Always pointing the finger at GOD! Psalm 103:2** It is always a sound spiritual instinct to follow the later psalmist's exhortation, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits”*.

Bonus nugget. **Worship doesn't make God bigger or greater but It sure makes Him bigger to us!**



Not surprisingly, at the end of his long and eventful life Joshua begins by looking back.

When Moses received the 10 commandments... Jewish tradition tells us God spoke them so all the nations of the world could hear in their own language.

They are all down the mountain worshipping around a golden calf **They forgot!!! PEOPLE FORGET**

Deut. 8:10 "When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. 11 "Beware that you do not **forget** the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, "lest--when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; "and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; 14 "when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; 15 "who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; He recounts again all the miracles... **they needed to hear it again!!** Who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; 16 "who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end-- 17 "then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' 18 "And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 "Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. 20 "As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God.

Reading through the Bible in a year and going through all these passages and seeing all God had done and the pleading towards His people not to forget, I wrote this... "*God desperately desires for us to never forget Him. He, seemingly, in tears pleads for us to not forget Him. He says write my laws on your heart, write them on your foreheads, doorposts, everywhere so you don't forget me.*"

Why doesn't God want us to forget Him? the gospel message... LOVE!!!

CHURCH, DON'T FORGET TO REMEMBER HIS LOVE

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. But looking back at what had been accomplished would be a powerful stimulus to go on believing the great promise of verse 5: *There is neither shortage of commitment nor lack of ability with Yahweh.*

5 And the Lord your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. Yes, they had proven to be active and mostly obedient to do their part... and yet “God will expel” and God did and will continue to... why because the battle belongs to the Lord.

→ Continuing in verse 5... So you shall possess their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

Warning 1. Keep God's word verse 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, **Ecclesiastes 10:2 NIV** The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.

People who don't like what the Bible says, just say its not applicable to us today. We need to be **courageous** so they can be obedient. Following God and His word isn't something for the faint of heart.

Balance... So Joshua says... Give God the glory and praise as you remember what he has done... you now must continue by keeping His word...

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, *The most important point was that Israel is to remain a separated people, not infected with the wickedness around them (23:7-8; Ex 34:10-17; Deut 7:2-4). Disobedience would be a gradual thin*

As Hughes so tragically points out, “Later history was to prove how appropriate the warning was. The subsequent decline in the spiritual health of God's people, as the Old Testament unfolds, can all be traced to this basic cause. Whether it was the period of the judges, the division of the kingdom, the fall of the northern kingdom to the Assyrians, or the collapse of Judah and Jerusalem before the Babylonians, with the ensuing exile, the story was always the same. Mixing with the pagan peoples around them always predisposed Israel to idolatry accompanied by its accompanying immorality. The two always run closely together in Scripture, as in life. The attractions of other gods were, and still are, numerous.

God is committed to fight for his people, but Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:12... “fight the good fight”. In human terms they are more likely to settle for a comfortable level of compromise that

will not require such continuing discipline or sacrifice or single-mindedness. As a result, complacency becomes endemic.

Warning 2. Abide in the Lord verse **8** but you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day **The words “hold fast” here is the same as in Genesis 2:24. Israel was “married” to YHWH at Mt. Sinai and was expected to be a faithful spouse and cleave to the Lord. Sadly Israel became an unfaithful wife, a prostitute, as she turned to the gods of other nations.**

Don't even talk about them... How quickly our hearts turn. Moses comes down the mountain and bam... they are worshipping a golden cow

An old Mafia saying says something to the effect of, "Keep your friends close, but your enemies even closer" but this is exactly what Christians *are not* to do. The normal Christian, by and large, is not called to become an expert in the cults or in heresy, but to become an expert in Jesus Christ - to hold fast to Him. Know the truth and you will know a lie.

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.

➡ As Israel abided in the LORD, they saw God do great things through them. As they continued to abide, they would continue to see great things as God fights on their behalf. **Abide... meno “to continue in”** The aorist Active imperative occurs 375 in the New Testament

10 One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God *is* He who fights for you, as He promised you. As Paul would later write in Romans 8:31 **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”** The answer for them, as for us, is that here are innumerable enemies, but when the Lord takes the field, the outcome is beyond question. Joshua was being historical but motivational as well... because He will do it in the future.

verses 11-16 is a stern warning. The Word of God is a two-edged sword (Heb 4:12). If we obey it, God will bless and help us; if we disobey it, God will chasten us until we submit to Him. (Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:6)

♥ **Warning 3. Love the Lord** **11** Therefore take **careful heed** to yourselves, that you love the Lord your God. We love Him by obeying Him and not forgetting Him.

"REMEMBER" IS LISTED CLOSE TO 300X'S IN THE BIBLE **WHY? PEOPLE FORGET**

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, Continuing in God's love will mean that they keep themselves separate from the ungodly influences around them; they must keep themselves *unspotted from the*

world. (James 1:27). **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. "snares.. Traps.. scourges... thorns..." Such is the description of the wicked nations which the Lord would use to discipline His people. As Spurgeon said, "God will not allow His children to sin successfully."

Their abiding had been blessed, so if they fail to abide in the LORD, they will also depart from God's blessing.



Redpath "How often we see that the temptation we have pampered and encouraged and indulged in has become a scourge and a thorn in our side. The compromising Christian is not a happy man. Let the enemy remain in a Christian life, let him have one foothold, and he soon becomes a scourge."

These ungodly influences never advertise themselves as instruments of torture; they present themselves as wonderful things - but we must see past all this

14 "Behold, this day *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. **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.

In verses 15-16, we are reminded of the familiar teaching about covenant blessings and covenant curses, dependent on obedience or rebellion.

We relate to God under a different covenant, a new and better covenant (Hebrews 8:6-7), by which Jesus has *redeemed us from the curse of the law* (Galatians 3:10-14). Therefore, in Jesus we no longer can experience God's "faithfulness to curse us" as Israel knew it. Yet we do experience God's faithfulness to correct us as a loving Father (Hebrews 12:7), and we do experience a lack of appropriated blessing if we do not abide in Jesus.

There really are only two ways to live, and Joshua wants the next generation to be in no doubt about the seriousness of the issue.

→ *There can be no compromise or complacency about the battle that is joined between truth and falsehood.*



The default position of the human heart will always be to worship ourselves, to be our own god, under the influence of our idols, which we exalt to the supreme position in our lives.

verse 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, The way to conquer idolatry is to make this Lord our God, and the way to do that is to be obedient to all that He says in Scripture. That practiced conviction is what will keep us from idols.

verse 11. “Be careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God.” Love is obey so like John’s last words “Love one another” Joshua’s last words “Love God” The heart of our faith is our heart relationship with our God. This should be our greatest life aim – to love God more and more.

1. We will want to please him,
2. to serve him,
3. To worship him,
4. To live for him,
5. To suffer and even to die for him.

Last words of Joshua... Joshua’s three main warnings: Keep God’s Word (23:6); abide in the Lord (23:8); and love the Lord (23:11)

Finally... That is the challenge Joshua presented to the up-and-coming generation, and it is the challenge the Holy Spirit still puts before us today. Love conquers everything because it is the currency of God’s eternal kingdom. When everything else disappears, love endures (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). So, beyond whatever we might seek to do in God’s service, what will outlast it all will our love for him, because he has loved us with an everlasting love. “Be very careful, therefore to love the Lord your God.” (Joshua 23:11). Only that will keep us from turning back. Only that will keep us pressing on to glory