

## **Joshua 23:1-16**

### **1. Chp. 23 A word to the leaders from history**

#### **“The invisible man”**

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#### **I. Intro**

Most commentators believe that at the end of the conquest Joshua was around 90 and according to chapter 24:29 he died at 110 that means around 20 years have elapsed from the end of chapter 22 to the beginning of chapter 23. Joshua’s long life started in Egyptian bondage and ended in a worship service in the Promised Land. In between those events God used him to lead Israel in defeating the enemy, conquering the land, and claiming the promised inheritance. Along with the Apostle Paul, Joshua could sincerely say what Paul said 2 Tim. 4:7, *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”*. At the end of a long and full life, Joshua’s greatest concern wasn’t himself no his greatest concern was God’s people and their relationship to the Lord.

In Joshua’s final words we hear him warn that what today is only an “innocent Canaanite” in our lives may become a torture and a snare tomorrow. Let the enemy remain in a Christian life, let him have one foothold, and he soon becomes a scourge. Friend’s ungodly influences never advertise themselves as instruments of torture; they present themselves as wonderful things.

#### **II. Vs. 1-5 Possessing what God has expelled**

Vs. 1-2 Joshua at a 110 is still 10 years younger than Moses was at his death but apparently feeling the effects of his age more than Moses had as twice we are told of this. The people of God were enjoying the rest of the Lord in the land of promise and the combination of Joshua's advanced age and the people's rest sets the tone for His departing words as verse 14 suggests that his time is short. So Joshua first in chapter 23 calls the leadership of the nation together to here his final words than in chapter 24 he will address the whole nation.

Hey folks there is a lot to say here with regards to finishing strong in your life in Christ. Much of the movements of the Lord within people and churches start strong but don't finish strong. Remember the victory does not go to the person or team that starts well it goes to the one that finishes well. Consider the remarkable John Wesley, the traveling preacher who, traveled 250,000 miles on horseback wrote 400 books, spoke 10 different languages and at the age of 81 was frustrated because he could only read 5 ours a day before his eyes started bothering him. At 86 he was down on himself because he had to cut back to two sermons a day and couldn't wake up before 5:30 AM. What was the key to John Wesley's longevity and drive? Well it was three things:

- His passion for the Lord
- His devotion to God's Word
- His love for God's people

Oh dear ones no retirement for God's children, only redeployment! Remember Joshua's predecessor Moses didn't even start his ministry until he was 80. Saint's don't focus on what you accomplished for the Lord in the past, live for today in your service towards the Lord. Here is how Paul said it in Philip. 3:12 *"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."* Then to the

Ephesians in 5:15-16 Paul admonished them saying, “*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*” Oh that God in these last days would raise up more Moses’, more Joshua’s, men and women who no matter their age would hear the words of Mordecai to Esther in 4:4 “*Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*”

Vs. 3-5 Hey did you notice that as Joshua is finishing well that he hasn’t lost perspective? In verses 3-5 Joshua reminds his leaders that “*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.*” Then in verse five he tells them “*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.*” Only in verse 4 do we hear him say, “*I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain....*” As Joshua reflected on a life of service to the Lord what he remembered was the Lord’s greatness and His keeping His promises, not what he had done. You may remember that it was Joshua that the Lord used as general and commander in the conquest of the land of promise but as far as he was concerned it was all about what “*the Lord their God had done*” not what Joshua had done. And because of this Joshua claimed they could trust God to “*expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight*”. God didn’t need Joshua to ensure victory in the past and He wasn’t going to need Joshua to ensure victory in the future. It was not Joshua that the nation needed to depend upon it was the Lord they needed to trust completely to ensure victory. **One of the hallmarks of a true servant of the Lord is when people observe their ministry who gets the praise, the Lord or the instrument?** As far as Joshua was concerned **our responsibility is to possess what the Lord has expelled.** Another thing that blesses my heart with regards to the

words of Joshua was that he fully expected that the Lord had far more work to do which meant that they were not done yet possessing more of what God had expelled.

Hey, saints do you ever tire of the things you enjoy? Is it ever a bummer to have yet another glorious adventure of faith in Jesus? **God's part is to expel our part is to walk into and posses the victory He has won.** There is so much the Lord wants you and me to walk into if we will but step forward in faith walking into what He has already expelled. All too often I'm afraid that we set back not moving forward in His provision and complain in our prayer that He hasn't provided. You've got to move forward not just sit there passively saying, "*Lord I need..., Lord, it's not fair that...*". Folk's **God expels we posses,** get up and get going and stop belly aching about your lack, I remind you again of James words in 4:2, "*you do not have because you do not ask.*" You have heard the old adage that the "*Early bird gets the worm*" true but it's "*The 2<sup>nd</sup> the mouse that gets the cheese*"! What you trying to say pastor? Only this **get up and get going posses what He has expelled and don't stop until you are looking into His eyes of love.**

### III. Vs. 6-8 Three things to keep

Vs. 6-8 Now notice that in this section the sentence starts with the word, "***Therefore***" which tells us that what is to follow will be instructions on how to posses what God has expelled and we are given **three things to keep in order to posses what God has expelled.**

1. Vs. 6 **Keep the Word:** "*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*". Wow, here is the number one thing Joshua tells the leadership that they need to keep and it is the Word of God. Now that suggests a strategy of the enemy does it not? Satan's strategy is to get us away from reading, hearing and obeying what God's word has to say. One of my pet peeves while pastoring in California was to

read the Church news paper adds and listen how pastors would describe their fellowships to try to attract folks to come. The one that got my blood to boil was the phrase “***relevant bible teaching***” Webster’s dictionary defines the word relevant as meaning “*having significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand*”. I always wanted to ask them two things:

1. What part of God’s word doesn’t have a “*significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand*”?
2. What pastor or teacher is qualified to decide which part of the Bible is or isn’t relevant to the “*matter at hand*”?

Here is what God’s word has to say on this matter at hand in 2 Tim. 3:16 “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*”. Any fellowship that does not teach the whole council of the word of God and is not consistently exhorting those that fellowship there to do, read and trust God’s word is **steeling from the congregation**. Steeling? Yes, they are thieves as they are ripping off the ability of God’s people to possess what God has expelled. I’m afraid that we pastor’s have marketed Jesus right out of the Church and many those who come to church are looking more at the building, entertainment and the programs instead of making sure that God’s word is being taught as the Lord spoke through Isaiah in 28:13 saying, “*But the word of the Lord was to them, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, that they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught.*” Folks, any program or plan of the church that seeks to lessen your dependence upon and need for God’s word is not of God. If the folks

that come out of the fellowship through out the week services do so saying, “*Man that was so entertaining*” than we have missed what we are called to do. Do you not find it a bit interesting that Joshua uses the phrase in front of “*keep and do all that is written in the Word*” a requiring us to be “**very courageous**”? Again Webster’s dictionary sheds light as it says that the definition of courage is “*mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty*”. In the Hebrew to word means to “***fasten upon or catch and cleave***” and again it paints the picture that our old nature, satan and the world system will be in constant battle against our hearts desire to read and be transformed by God’s word. Paul exhorts Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:15 to “*Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*”

2. Vs. 7 **Keep separate from the world**: “*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*”. Again we notice that this 2<sup>nd</sup> exhortation is tied to the first (*keeping the word*) as Joshua uses the word “**lest**” with regards to keeping the word. In other words not keeping the word would lead to them not living separate from the false world system. Notice that Joshua is **not calling them to live in a monastery** as we are among the nations, we are in the world but we are never to be of the world. Saints, I told my kids when they started High School that there were only two possibilities in this life either you will be influencing the world or the world will be influencing you, so which is it for you? Notice that there is a threefold progressing with regards to becoming more like the world:

- A. *“Make mention of the name of their gods”*: The word in Hebrew means to *“speak fondly of”*. Far too often I hear believers speak fondly of what the world is addicted to, envious of the hedonistic self-serving life style of the world system. I’m afraid that we don’t speak often enough of the ruin that following the world system has created in individuals and nations. Saints the *“good old days”* weren’t good as they led to our destruction, ruin and heart ache.
- B. *“Cause anyone to swear by them”*: Speaking fondly of what the world worships will cause us to start making “oaths” to them. What this suggests is that once we speak fondly of something it begins to occupy our time and attention and we begin to alter our life style around it.
- C. *“Serve them nor bow down to them”*: Finally we are worshipping the altar and serving this worldly attitude and we know adopt it instead of the things of God.
3. Vs. 8 **Keep close to God**: *“you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day.”* The third thing that Joshua tells the leaders to keep in order that they may possess what God has expelled is closeness to the Lord God. This word *“hold fast”* in conjunction with what Joshua says that they are to hold fast too, **(the Lord their God)** suggests far more than a mere mechanical adherence. It speaks of a relational affection that draws a child into the arms of their father. In telling these fellows to stay close to God Joshua mentions two things that should assist them in doing so:
- A. **Your God**: They had already made closeness to God a relational experience not a religious ordinance. Hey saints if our closeness to God becomes a

commandment instead of a personal relationship than we will find this difficult. Relationships are all about how you view them, “*I got go to the dentist*” verses “*I get to hang out with my wife*”.

- B. **As you have done so to this day**: Joshua was not instituting something new for these guys he was merely asking them to continue to do what they already been doing. Here is how this works practically, the more you are close to God the more you will experience His love for you and the more you will experience His love for you the more you will love Him.

#### IV. Vs. 9-16 Two things to avoid

Vs. 9-16 Having given the leaders three things to keep in order that they may possess what God has expelled Joshua now warns them of two things which can derail what God accomplished:

1. Vs. 9-11 **Taking credit for what God has done**: No one was able to stand against them but that wasn't because of their military prowess our effort but rather because “*the Lord had driven*” them out even “*great and strong nations*”. Oh dear ones we need to be ever on guard with our hearts with regards to pride slipping in whereby we begging to take credit for the things that God has accomplished. Hey saints our old nature constantly wants to be able to take credit for what God alone has done. Though He may have used us to put to flight a 1,000 it was still He who fights for us as He has promised. Notice as well the admonition of Joshua in verse 11 to “*you love the Lord your God*” you see it becomes very easy for us to love what we are doing for God even it is He who has done it rather than just taking joy in his love. God love is not tied to our performance it is tied only to His.

2. Vs. 12-13 **Compromise and complacency**: Joshua warns them of the danger of complacency as a lack of clinging to the Lord will lead to clinging to the remnant of the world. Hey have you realized that within each of us there remains a remnant of the world? And if we marry ourselves to it we will become ensnared and entrapped.

Man it is so easy even though we have personally experienced the blessing and goodness of the Lord to pull away from the Lord. Saints, there is no “*autopilot*” in our relationship with the Lord and our past experiences in His love will not suffice to maintain our present relationship. A failure to draw near to the Lord will cause extreme discomfort “*scourges in our side*” and “*thrones in our eyes*”. What awaits us if we don’t cleave to the Lord is defeat, discomfort and disgrace.

Vs. 14-16 Lastly Joshua sums up what he has told them and that is “*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.*” God had been completely faithful and if they disregarded His blessing and grace then they would cease from the land of promises.