

God's Message to Us in Joshua 1-24

Halifax, NS

18 February 2018, 2:00 PM

Introduction

In our series preaching through the books of the Bible, we have just completed preaching through the five books of Moses which are also called the books of the law.

- That means that today we are ready to look at Joshua.
- I would remind you that in this series, we are looking at what God's message is to us in our day and in our present situation from each book in the Bible.
 - In the New Testament, we are reminded that the things written in the Old Testament were written for us.
 - 1 Cor 10:11 says: **Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.**
 - And Romans 15:4 says: **For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.**

The book of Joshua has two main sections...

- The first part, from chapter 1-12, tells of the Israel gaining the land of their inheritance by conquest...
- The second part, from chapter 13-24, speaks of their settling into the land.

But what does this have to do with us?

- God commanded Israel to go into the land of Canaan and to wipe out all the nations with a complete slaughter and to destroy their cities and villages.
 - Then, having done this, they were to live in the land as His people, living according to His commandments and worshipping Him with the rituals of the Law of Moses.
- What could their conquest of this land and their settlement in it possibly have to do with us?
 - We are not to go out with swords and spears to conquer nations that are in rebellion against God—nor are we to set up ritual worship in a central sanctuary.
 - The issue is not that what Israel did in wiping out these nations was unjust.
 - It was not—God commanded it because of the wickedness of these nations, just as some centuries before He had commanded the wind and the rain to flood the earth and wipe out the whole world (except Noah, who found grace) for its wickedness.
 - If God had commanded us wipe out the nations today with swords, it would be right for us to do it.
 - He did not refrain from commanding us to do this because it was wrong, but because He has appointed a day to judge them when Jesus returns.
 - Those who are offended with God judging the Canaanites by sending Israel in to wipe them out need to realise that the scale and horror of God's judgment when Jesus returns will be far greater.
 - We would plead with them to flee from the wrath to come by repenting of their sin and turning to Jesus for salvation.
 - If they reject God's mercy in Christ, they will perish in ways that make God wiping out the Canaanites by the hand of Israel look mild.

- But the fact remains that God has not called us to go in and wipe out nations for Him today, and then live in that land around a central sanctuary.
 - So what does this book about that have to do with us?
 - It is this.
 - Just as God told them to obtain their inheritance and dwell in it for Him, so He has commanded us to obtain our inheritance as His people and to dwell in it for Him.
 - Our inheritance is the inheritance we have in Jesus Christ.
 - God has given Him all the nations as His inheritance.
 - And we are to go into the whole world—to every individual—and to call them to enter into Christ’s kingdom.
 - We are to call them to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins so that they can serve the living God.
 - We are to tell them that Jesus will have the whole world, and that if they refuse Him, they will be cut off and cast into the outer darkness when He comes to judge the world.
 - We ourselves are to enter His kingdom by repentance and faith, and we are to call the nations to enter His kingdom by repentance and faith, and then we are to live for Him.
 - But we can no more bring people into the kingdom—get them to repent—than Israel could conquer the land of Canaan.
 - It is only with God’s help that we can obtain the kingdom for Jesus.
 - Like I mentioned last week, there were twelve trembling disciples with very little clout who were given this task at the beginning—and now the kingdom is all over the world and still spreading.
- So you see, the book of Joshua has lessons for us both in obtaining our inheritance and in living in our inheritance as we obtain it.
 - In chapters 1-12, we should learn that we can only take possession of our inheritance with God’s help (by faith).
 - As we see Israel conquering by faith, we are taught to conquer by faith.
 - And in chapters 13-24, we should learn from Joshua that we are to live for God alone in our inheritance.
 - As we see Israel living in God’s kingdom and approaching Him through the tabernacle, we are taught to live in His kingdom and to approach Him through Jesus Christ crucified.

Let’s proceed with each of these lessons, starting with the first... again...

I. As we see Israel conquering by faith to take their inheritance, we are taught to conquer by faith in taking our inheritance.

A. Look first of all at how God prepares His people to conquer by faith in Him.

1. First, He tells them that they are to completely rely on Him.
 - Look at the first 9 verses in chapter 1.

- These verses are so central to the whole book that I am going to read through them, pausing to make comments as we go.
- **Joshua 1:1-4: After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: ² "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. ⁴ From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory."**
 - Here you have God's declaration that He has given the land of Canaan to them, just as He has declared to us that He has given the nations to Christ as His inheritance.
 - Just as they are to go and take the land, so are we.
- But this is where faith comes into the picture.
 - We can no more turn people to Christ than they could conquer the land, but God calls us to trust in Him as we go—to go by faith in Him.
 - Look at what God says in Joshua 1:5:
- **Joshua 1:5-6: "No man shall *be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.* ⁶ Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them."**
 - From this you see that we are to be confident, not in our own strength, but because God Himself promises to be with us.
 - Just as their enemies could not stand up against their onslaught, so the enemies of Christ cannot stand up against the gospel—it breaks them—just as it has broken you if you are trusting in Christ today.
 - It comes to us with irresistible power... as Luke recognised when he reported what happened when Paul preached at Antioch in Pisidia...
 - In Acts 13:48, after Paul had preached the gospel to them, **Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.**
 - Just think of the power of the gospel—these nations who had no interest in the living God hear the gospel, and they believe—they are brought from death to life!
 - Paul was preaching to people, as he says in Ephesians, who were dead in trespasses and sins—but God makes them alive!
 - They cannot resist the gospel when God opens their heart to believe.
 - We are to go forth with the gospel to the nations with this confidence—not one who is appointed to eternal life can resist.
 - That is why today there are people all over the world that believe, and that is why we should be encouraged to keep on going with the gospel.
 - As God went on to tell Joshua... verse 7...

- **Joshua 1:7: “Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe 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.”**
- What a strategy!
 - Joshua is going into battle, but the way to success was not by his own cleverness or skill, but by continuing in God’s Word.
- This is, perhaps, even more important for us in conquering with the gospel!
 - The great danger for us is that we will start to focus on our own techniques of evangelism—we will start to shape the message and how it is presented so as to appeal to the world.
 - Too often the church has done that, and when we have, we may get people in, but we lose the gospel (so we don’t really get them to Christ).
 - In the ancient world, that is how they got started with venerating Mary as a mediator—
 - Pagan people thought that male deities were unapproachable and not merciful—so the church, instead of sticking to God’s Word, decided to accommodate them by introducing prayers to Mary.
 - What they should have done is shown the people that God in not like the pagan deities, and stressed how He had even given His life to be cursed on the cross that we might be saved.
 - Sadly, they got people in by praying to Mary instead of by trusting in Jesus.
 - And what do we do today?
 - People today don’t like the idea of judgment—so to get them in, we downplay that and just talk about the love of God—we are embarrassed even to talk about the genocide that God appointed in Joshua.
 - We leave out the doctrine of hell and call them to come to God to be loved by Him—
 - but in doing so, they never see the true foundation of love which is found in the fact that the Son of God had to be crucified to pay for our sins!
 - We gain nothing by changing the gospel—we are to meditate on God’s word day and night—not to modify it to suit unbelievers.
 - What we need is faith in God—success is only found in Him.
 - This is beautifully summed up in verse 9: **Josh 1:9: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”**
- So you see how God prepares them with these words in verses 1-9 that call them to take their inheritance by faith.
 - But He does not stop with that—

2. Second, He gives them encouragement from their enemies themselves.
 - In chapter 2, Joshua sends a few men to Jericho to look over the situation.
 - They enter the city and lodge with a harlot named Rahab.
 - She ends up reporting to them of how terrified all the people of Jericho are because they have heard about what the LORD did for Israel:
 - **Josh 2:9-11: and she said to the men: “I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹ And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”**
 - Do you see what a help that is?
 - It draws attention to the fact of how powerful God is so that the people of Israel will remember and will know that they can trust Him!
 - Sometimes, when we are in the middle of the situation, we don’t notice the obvious, and God uses unbelievers to point it out to us!
- I have had great encouragement in my faith from things that unbelievers have said.
 - Perhaps they comment on the love that we Christians have or the peace that we have in trials—and we realise that God really is visibly working in our lives before them.
 - And then we are encouraged to tell them of our hope and of the promises that we are trusting in.
- So God not only tells us that we need to trust in Him, but also gives us encouragements like the encouragement of Rahab—and then there is the third thing:
3. Third, He gives them symbols to show them that they must rely on Him.
 - There are three symbols in chapter 3-5:
 - a. First, in chapter 3-4, there is the crossing of the Jordan River.
 - It is in flood stage, but God has the priests take the ark (which represents God’s presence with them) and step into the waters (Josh 3:15).
 - He doesn’t dry up the waters first, as He did at Egypt, but the priests have to step in and then the waters cease to flow and Israel crosses over.
 - What a wonderful picture of the fact that we have to go in faith, even before we see the hand of God acting for us.
 - This reminds them that God is with them as they go to take the land.
 - In the New Testament, we lay hands and pray for missionaries as we send them out—remembering that God is with them.
 - It is a symbol that God has given us that we can trust Him to go with us when we step out for Him.

- b. Second, in chapter 5, the people are circumcised.
 - Their fathers had been excommunicated, so they were not circumcised in the wilderness—but now they are...
 - And this was a symbol in which God promised the people that He was their God and that they were His people.
 - Moses taught in Deuteronomy 30 that God would circumcise their hearts to love Him when they returned to Him after going astray...
 - So now they can be sure by this symbol that God was restored to them and that He was at work in their hearts by grace.
 - The symbol for us in the New Covenant is baptism, which also tells us that God is our God and that we are His people,
 - and which reminds us that to make us His people, Jesus baptises us with the Holy Spirit so that we will love Him and that He washes away our sin and guilt through the cross.
- c. Third, at the end of chapter 5, Joshua meets the commander of the army of the Lord—which is Jesus...
 - When Joshua falls on his face before Him and asks Him what He has to say, He majestically says: **“Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.”**
 - This enables him to remember who the One that he serves is!
 - He is the holy God who has all authority and power.
 - When we go into battle for the Lord, we need to go as worshippers, singing Psalms of victory that extol our great God and His holiness!
 - We worship Jesus as the risen Saviour, our holy God.
 - He is the Captain of the Lord’s army who we trust when we go to take our inheritance.

TRANS> So the first five chapters of Joshua all have to do with preparing God’s people to go forth and take our inheritance.

- It is very important for us to go forth in faith, fully trusting Him.
- B. In chapters 6-12, we see how the LORD indeed is the one who gives them the victory as they trust in Him. This should encourage us as we go out.
 - Take a look.
 1. First there is Jericho in Joshua 6.
 - In this battle, the LORD makes it extremely clear that it is by His power that the people of Jericho are defeated.
 - Here you have a great walled city that normally would have had to be starved out by a siege for months.
 - But the method is, in short, to do what God says and watch Him work!
 - At God’s command, they march around the city each day for seven days with the ark of the LORD, symbolising that God is with them;
 - Then on the seventh day, they march around seven times, blow the trumpets (which you will remember was a sign that God was with them), and then shout—and the walls fall flat.

- The lesson is very clear!
 - The battle is the LORD's.
 - We obey Him, and He conquers His enemies.
 - And because it is His victory, they were not supposed to take any spoils from the war—all was to be destroyed to show God's utter disdain for the wickedness of this city.
2. Next there is Ai in Joshua 7 and 8.
- Chapter 7 opens by reporting to us that a man named Achan had taken some of the things at Jericho that were devoted to destruction, stirring up God's anger against Israel.
 - But of course nobody in Israel but Achan knows about this.
 - Here you have a very marvellous example of God using what Achan did as an occasion to deal with a problem that had arisen in all the people.
 - After the victory at Jericho, which was totally God's doing, you can see that the men of Israel are getting proud.
 - "Look what we did to Jericho!"
 - Some men are sent to check out Ai, and they say, basically, "This will be a piece of cake! We don't need to bother everyone, just send three thousand men. It will be easy."
 - And the result is that these men are defeated—the men of Ai chase them away and kill thirty-six of them.
 - Joshua and all Israel are devastated—he falls on his face before the LORD and the LORD says (v 10): **"Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face?"**
 - He tells him that Israel has taken some of the accursed things. They find out that it was Achan and execute him, in this way dealing with the his sin.
 - There are three great lessons here—
 - First that we must not get proud after we have won a victory and forget that the battle is the Lord's...
 - Second, that we dare not mess around with things that God has told us not to mess around with! He is not to be trifled with.
 - The whole church at Corinth was sick and some even died because some of them were not rightly receiving the Lord's Supper.
 - Third, that we need to take action and remove the wicked person from among us if we want God's favour to be restored to us.
3. In chapter 9, you have the Gibeonites who come and deceive Israel.
- Even though they were just down the road from where Joshua was, they came to make a treaty, pretending to be from a faraway country.
 - Joshua is suspicious, but goes ahead and makes a treaty with them—because he does not consult the LORD about it.
 - Joshua was wrong to act without consulting the LORD, yet at the same time, through his error, God had mercy on Gibeon because they truly feared Him.
 - We learn from this that God is merciful, but we also learn that we should consult with God and not act rashly.

4. In chapter 10 you have a new challenge where five kings are terrified of Joshua and band together against the LORD and against His anointed.
 - I might mention here that in 1887, clay tablets dating from the 1400s BC were dug up containing reports about the conquest from the Canaanite perspective—where the Canaanites were reporting with great alarm that the Habiru people were carrying everything before them.
 - But for Joshua and his men, it could be very intimidating to see five kings and their kingdoms banding together to come against you...
 - But once again, the LORD shows that the battle is His.
 - He takes out most of them with hailstones—and also gives Joshua extra time to finish them off by causing the sun to stand still!
 - Clearly, the LORD is showing us that we must not fear our enemies because the battle is His, and He has all power.
 - Don't be intimidated even when there are many people banded together against you—when they all mock you for what you believe.
 - God will have the last word about who is foolish.
5. In chapter 11-12, Joshua substantially completes the work of taking the land and recounts to Israel the faithfulness of God.
 - In this, we see the faithfulness of God to do what He has promised, and that nobody can stand in His way.
 - In verse 11:23 it says: **So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war.**
 - God will gather in all those that He has given to Christ today—not one will be lost. Jesus tells us that.
 - We will gather them all in by His grace and power alone.

TRANS> But once we are given the kingdom, we must then learn here how to live it.

II. **We not only learn from Joshua how to take our inheritance, but also how to live in it once we have obtained it.**

- A. In chapter 13-22, each tribe is given their inheritance.
 - Several things are noteworthy.
 1. First, that each one does have their own inheritance—reminding us that we all have our inheritance in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.
 - We are all members of His body, and each one of us has a role to play.
 - If we do not do our part, we do not possess the land for Christ.
 - You all have different roles in God's kingdom—some as mothers of children, some as fathers and husbands, some as encouragers, some as exhorters, some as comforters, some as servants, some as givers, some as mighty in prayer or in faith, some as given to hospitality... Each of you has a God-given place.
 2. Second, we see that they are definitely to be a worshipping people in the land.
 - And so we see in Joshua 18:1 that the tabernacle is set up in the midst of the people and they assemble there.

- And all along the way as the other tribes get their inheritance in the land, they are reminded that the Levites' inheritance is the offerings of the Lord.
 - Their task is to maintain the worship of God, and each tribe is instructed to provide cities for the Levites among them.
 - God has given us our inheritance in Christ that we might be His people who worship Him too.
 - He doesn't save us just to deliver us from punishment, but so that we might be reconciled to Him and live for Him forever as His worshippers.
 - Eternal life is knowing the Father and knowing His Son Jesus Christ.
 - What good is our inheritance if we don't serve God?
 - We are to financially support the worship of God and to engage in it.
3. And closely related to this, we see in chapter 22 that all of the tribes are to worship God through Christ.
- As I have been emphasising to you in this sermon series, Christ was set forth in Israel ritually—at the tabernacle that God appointed.
 - The LORD stresses that all the tribes are to worship in this one place.
 - There is only one Saviour, and we can only approach God through Him.
 - For Israel, He was the Saviour who was ritually represented at the central sanctuary.
 - For us, He is the Saviour that God sent into the world, His only Son.
 - No one can come to the Father except through Him.
 - In Joshua 22, this is strongly emphasised when the tribes on the east side of the Jordan erect an altar.
 - The other tribes, very appropriately, go after them to make war with them because they fear that they are setting up another altar for worship—as if God had more than one way of salvation!
 - These tribes insist that it is only a replica of the altar that God appointed and that they have set it up as a memorial that they have a share in Israel's God also.
 - The tribes accept this, but the point remains: we are not to tolerate anyone who claims to be part of the church claiming that they come to God in some other way than through Jesus Christ.
 - There is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved.
- B. In chapters 13-23, there is also a strong emphasis on the fact that Israel must finish taking their inheritance.
1. Yes, Joshua had substantially led them in conquest of the whole land,
- but it is noted in chapter 13:1-7, that there are still Canaanites, Philistines, Geshurites, Gebalites, and Sidonians at the borders and in the mountains who must be wiped out.
 - Remaining inhabitants are expressly mentioned with many of the tribes when they are given their inheritance—there is still work to be done.
 - And in chapter 23, Joshua warns them not to make alliances with these people or to worship their gods, but to destroy them as the LORD has commanded.
 - We are not to rest until the gospel has been preached to all people.

2. In chapter 14, we have the record of an 85 year old hero—Caleb.
 - He and Joshua were the two spies who alone trusted God when the rest of Israel refused to go into Canaan in days of Moses.
 - And now Caleb, at 85, wants the special portion that God promised him for his family...
 - Look at what he says in Joshua 14:7-13:
 - I have to quote this in full because it is such a powerful testimony of the kind of faith that we need to finish the work God has given us to do:
 - **Joshua 14:7-13: “I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land, and I brought back word to him as *it was* in my heart. ⁸ Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the LORD my God. ⁹ So Moses swore on that day, saying, ‘Surely the land where your foot has trodden shall be your inheritance and your children’s forever, because you have wholly followed the LORD my God.’ ¹⁰ And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. ¹¹ As yet I *am as* strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength *was* then, so now *is* my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. ¹² Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim *were* there, and *that* the cities *were* great and fortified. It may be that the LORD *will be* with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said.” ¹³ And Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as an inheritance.**
 - He is still ready to take on the giants that were remaining in the land.
 - Oh that God would raise up men like this in our day!
3. In chapter 17, Joshua puts the people of Manasseh in their place—
 - They are just the opposite of Caleb—
 - Caleb wanted to take the part where the giants were because he was a great man of faith...
 - But the people of Manasseh are like people today feeling entitled to more than they have been given.
 - In 17:14-18, they come speaking of how great a people they are and so ought to be given more and better land that does not have Canaanites with iron chariots and woods to deal with.
 - Look at how Joshua turns their own words back on them in 17:17-18:
 - **“You *are* a great people and have great power; you shall not have *only* one lot, ¹⁸ but the mountain country shall be yours. Although it *is* wooded, you shall cut it down, and its farthest extent shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots *and* are strong.”**
 - Let there be no excuses.
 - When Christians complain that others are not doing enough in the church, or not doing it well, put them to work to show how it is to be done!
 - We are all responsible for finishing the job and we all need to be strong and courageous until all of the elect are gathered in to Christ.

- C. Joshua wraps everything up with a strong exhortation and encouragement to Israel to serve the LORD in the inheritance that He has given them.
- He does this in chapter 24.
 - 1. He tells them of all that God has done for them to give them this inheritance—bringing them out of Egypt, across the wilderness, and now into this land.
 - The LORD has been very faithful to them to do all that He has promised.
 - He has given them their inheritance—and now they are to live in it for His glory.
 - But Christian, just look at *our* inheritance in Christ.
 - We now have, not just ritual forgiveness and access to God, but actual forgiveness and access to Him through Jesus Christ crucified.
 - That is the glorious inheritance we share with true believers all over the world...
 - Let us joyfully serve God in our inheritance!
 - 2. I say again, the whole reason we have an inheritance in Christ is that we might be God’s worshipping people.
 - He has not given us an inheritance simply so we can live in paradise instead of living in hell.
 - He has given us an inheritance in Christ so that we can love Him and serve Him forever as our God—so that we can live for His glory in Christ.
 - 3. The great exhortation is to choose God and to serve God in our inheritance!
 - In 24:14-15, we have Joshua’s famous words that definitely apply to us as well: **“Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! ¹⁵ And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”**
 - That is what we are to do in the inheritance that the Lord has given to us.