

## Great Sermons of the Bible – Joshua

Good Morning (Evening)! Please pray with me. Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

We first meet Joshua in the book of Numbers 13:8 when we are told that he is one of the leaders of the Israelites that Moses has chosen to explore the land of Canaan, yet if you look at that verse, you will see that his name is Hoshea, because it wasn't until a little bit later that Moses changed his name to Joshua.

When I first realized that his name had been changed I was curious as to why. If you recall, after we are first introduced to Joshua he goes with a group to explore the land of Canaan. When they return Joshua and Caleb say that the Israelites should go and take possession of the land, but the other men who had been with them doubted this and said that the Canaanites and Amalekites would be stronger than they were and defeat them. Joshua says in Numbers 14:7-9 "...The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of that land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

Joshua had faith and believed that God would be with the Israelites, just as God had promised them, yet the assembly doubted him and talked about killing him. This is where we somewhat understand his name change. Moses was trying to protect Joshua by changing his name because in Judaism there is the idea that a change of name can protect a person from harm.

So, now that we know a little bit more about Joshua's beginnings than we may have, I think it's important to look at all that Joshua has done, who he is, and why this scripture that was just read is so important.

While wandering in the desert we see that Joshua is Moses' aide, and often with Moses at some pretty important moments during this time in the wilderness. In Exodus 24:13 we are told "Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God." Joshua walked part of the way with Moses before Moses spoke to God. Joshua reunites with Moses as Moses is walking back down the mountain, and it is Joshua who hears the noises coming from their camp and mistakes it to be sounds of war. Yet it is actually the people singing as they have begun to worship the golden calf.

Once Moses realizes what has happened, he breaks the tablets and tells the Israelites that because of this, they will spend the next 40 years in the desert.

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Joshua, who with Caleb, saw the land that the Israelites should have gotten right away, goes from tasting the fruit to hearing that they would spend the next 40 years wandering the desert due to the fact that the Israelites doubted God's provision.

In Joshua 1 we read “After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ‘Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them ... No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; **I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous**, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.’” (Joshua 1: 1-2, 5-6)

It is Joshua who God spoke to once Moses died and instructed him to lead the Israelites into the promised land. And the words that God says to Joshua “I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous” are the same words God gave to Moses to tell the Israelites in Deuteronomy 31:6.

“Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the Spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses.” (Deut. 34:9)

Joshua now has the Spirit within him that was within Moses.

So here we are with Joshua in chapter 24. By this point we know that Joshua is kind of a big deal. He not only was Moses' second in command, but is now the one God has placed in charge.

But, what must it have been like for Joshua to have heard all about Moses' time at the top of the mountain, only to watch all of that joy and excitement fade when he realizes what has happened at the camp?

What must it have been like for him to realize that when Moses died he is the one who will lead the people into the promised land?

Joshua has watched as the Israelites have tried to kill him; watched as they have failed to trust in God, and heard them complain throughout their time in the desert. He has seen them give up their trust in God and begin to worship other gods.

HOW FRUSTRATING must it be to watch a group with so much potential and guidance, throw it all away day after day, to then be told you were going to be the one to lead them.

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Joshua, has not only kept his heart and mind on God, he has watched as those around him have failed to do the same, and had to deal with the consequences of their decisions.

And that's exactly where we find him in our scripture today. After reminding the Israelites all that God has done for them. Reminding them of how God brought them out of the desert. How God has given this land, and helped them to defeat their enemies so that what God promised to Moses would be true.

Joshua has endured so much in these past 40 years that when I think about him addressing the Israelites in chapter 24 I can only imagine what he must be feeling.

How many times have you been in a situation or a period of your life where it feels like all the support you have given someone, or the sacrifices you have made, go unnoticed or unappreciated and you are left to continue to care for them. To guide them. Knowing that some of them will never understand what you went through?

That's exactly what Joshua is dealing with. And now, after all of this, after seeing the provision of God at work in a real and tangible way in his life, Joshua is having to ask those who have traveled with him if they are willing to serve the Lord.

And it is at the end of verse 15 that we find one of the most popular passages from the Bible "As for me and my house, we will SERVE the Lord."

How many times have we read that on something without thinking about what it meant when Joshua was saying it? How many times have we forgotten what Joshua has gone through and is dealing with when he said this to the Israelites?

Joshua is not saying this to prove that he is a Christian, or to tell his neighbors that he reads his Bible and prays every day. Joshua is reminding the Israelites that for over 40 years, through times in the desert, through episodes of complaining, and through people threatening to take his life, he has not forgotten that God is with him, he has not forgotten how great and powerful God is and that God is to be praised.

We may think Joshua pressing the Israelites over and over in this chapter about who they are serving to be redundant, but it's not. In these 11 verses the word serve is mentioned 13 times (at least in the NIV). 13 times! Who the Israelites are worshipping is a big deal to Joshua, and should be a big deal to us.

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Joshua has to call them out on the fact that they have been worshipping other gods, the gods of the Amorites.

Often, the lowercase g, gods, that people back then would have served were tied geographically to the land they protected. These gods guaranteed security and abundance to all who lived within their region. Yet Joshua wants to get the point across to these stubborn Israelites that the God that he worships, our God, is not tied to the land, to any place or sanctuary. Our God makes a different kind of promise to the Israelites, to us. Joshua is telling them that no matter where they go, his God will be with them. That no matter what they go through, whether prosperity or suffering and trials, his God will be with them. Joshua's God, our God, promises security and abundance, our God is present through all that life brings. Our God is not tied down or a god of certain circumstances.

For a battle-worn, world-weary, wandering community that the Israelites were, this is a different kind of promise from a different kind of God. Through it, they glimpse the one God who is present with them in birth, in death, in humiliation, in joy, in wandering, and in arrival. Our God is with us whether we are overjoyed or unemployed, at the top of the mountain or at our wits end, the healthiest we have been in a while or sick without a sign of hope; God is with us when we feel grounded or lost and wondering when we will be found.

Joshua is telling them that his God is one who delights in them and desires more than safety and plenty for them. This God desires new life for them. But in order for them to understand this, they have to understand that the covenant with this God requires them to be loyal and faithful. They have to recognize the one God who has been with them since before they left Egypt.

And we need to remember this too.

Joshua is telling them about this God that is so great and powerful, reminding them what they have been through, and at the same time telling them they have to pick who they will serve.

This text not only points out the fact that the Israelites had been worshipping other gods, but is a good reminder for us as well. We are in the season of Lent, and on Ash Wednesday we talked about how what we spend our time and energy on reflects who or what we are worshipping. That this season is a reminder for us to look at our lives and our time and see if we are giving God the service that God is due.

When we think about what the Israelites have done in light of our own failings, it isn't hard to see how they may have wandered away from worshipping God.

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When I think about the distractions or the fears that the Israelites may have experienced I think about distractions and fears within my own life and how they distract from God and all that God has done for me.

I do not want to brag, but when it comes to worrying I am one of the best in the business. I can worry about grades, about making it to a meeting on time, and about how little sleep I'm going to get four days from now. I will be working on a paper or reading for class and my mind will easily wander to all that is left to do, which will then lead me to think about how little time I have to do all of my work, which then causes my heart rate to slowly rise, and before you know it I am light years away from my readings and focused on everything but what I started out to accomplish.

I think this may be how the Israelites operated during this time of wandering in the wilderness. After all, it had been 40 years, so I imagine with each new day came another thought of whether or not they would ever make it to their destination or if they would just be walking for the rest of their lives.

So they turned their attention to other gods. They got distracted. And it took Joshua and his trust in God and what God was doing to help them refocus and recenter their attention.

Last week Pastor Richard talked about Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and verse 5 says that we are to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” When Joshua gives this speech, he recognizes that the Israelites are not doing this. And luckily, he sees this and asks them over and over, pressing the people to choose whom they will serve, driving home the seriousness of their decision. Over and over again the people say that they are going to serve God, yet Joshua keeps asking them, keeps making sure they understand what they are saying.

Joshua wants to make sure they recognize what they are committing to doing. In verses 19 and 20 he says “You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

Maybe up to this point the Israelites weren't aware at how far away from God they had fallen. Maybe their worship of other gods was so natural to the area they were in and the current climate that the implications of what they were doing were not as obvious. But now, now that they know what this means, now that they know who the God of Joshua is, now that they have recognized all that God has done for them, to worship a god other than the God would be breaking a promise and blatantly sinning against God. And Joshua wants to make sure this is made clear to them.

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The choice they make here will determine what their future looks like.

And the same is true for us. If we get caught up in the world around us and what those in our midst are doing that may not be in service to God, then our future is in trouble.

So let us instead remember these words from Joshua. Let us be witnesses to ourselves and one another that we are choosing to serve the Lord. And let us go from this place knowing that the God we worship is with us in every situation, no matter how high or how low we may find ourselves. Amen.