

The Book of Jesus | Crossing Into the Land of Promise

Joshua's Last Stand (1)

Joshua 23.1-16

10.21.18

Now it came about after many days, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies on every side, and Joshua was old, advanced in years,² that Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders and their heads and their judges and their officers, and said to them, "I am old, advanced in years."³ "And 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 been fighting for you."⁴ "See, I have apportioned to you these nations which remain as an inheritance for your tribes, with all the nations which I have cut off, from the Jordan even to the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun."⁵ "The LORD your God, He will thrust them out from before you and drive them from before you; and you will possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you."⁶ "Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left,⁷ so that you will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods, or make anyone swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them."⁸ "But you are to cling to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day."⁹ "For the LORD has driven out great and strong nations from before you; and as for you, no man has stood before you to this day."¹⁰ "One of your men puts to flight a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, just as He promised you."¹¹ "So take diligent heed to yourselves to love the LORD your God."¹² "For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you,¹³ know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

¹⁴ *"Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed."¹⁵ "It shall come about that just as all the good words which the LORD your God spoke to you have come upon you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the threats, until He has destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you."¹⁶ "When you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you."*

We've been looking at the Book of Joshua ... he is the successor of Moses. And Joshua is the prophet and general who brings the twelve tribes of Israel INTO the Promised Land. And we said from the start that the relationship between Moses and Joshua is a kind of symbol for the whole story of the Bible. Moses stands for the Law and Joshua symbolizes the Gospel.

The Messiah – Jesus Christ or (in Hebrew) “Yeshua” i.e. Joshua – Jesus Christ does for us what the Law cannot do – He, Jesus Christ, the final Joshua fulfills the Law of Moses on behalf of

everyone who believes. Moses (representing the Law) can't take us into our inheritance (he dies outside the Promised Land) but Joshua (representing the Gospel/Messiah) he brings the people into their inheritance.

Moses commands but Joshua obeys. Moses fails but Joshua succeeds. The Law of Moses condemns us but the Greater Joshua forgives and saves... and takes all those who trust Him into the inheritance.

Now Joshua is old and dying. The Land is conquered. God has given Israel rest and the Land is divided among the tribes – the inheritance is given by God, through Joshua.

AND, as we said, the spiritual life is NOT a sprint; it's NOT even a marathon... it's a relay. The book began with a passing of the baton (from Moses to Joshua) and now Joshua's leg of the race is completed and ONCE AGAIN the baton passes – from Moses to Joshua and from Joshua to the people.

And this illustrious career concludes... this passing of the baton commences with a speech (two parts – Chs 23-24 – this week and next) Today, we draw near and hear this celebratory and serious charge to the people... and it is a kind of charge for us... Joshua is laying tracks for the spiritual life – it's another clarifying moment – Let's look at:

- 1) A Common Genre
- 2) The Uncommon Dynamic
- 3) The Missing Piece That Makes All the Difference

The common genre... found in lots of places in the Bible is the farewell speech. It's a very common type of address used by Moses (all of Deuteronomy but esp 31ff)... Before Moses Isaac gives one (Gen 27) and Jacob (Gen 48-49) and Samuel (1Sam 12) and David (1Ki 2). Even after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul gives a classic kind of farewell speech to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20).

These speeches are usually a mix of blessings and of warnings. Often there's a sense of urgency and warning about dangers that the younger witnesses to the speech may not recognize... The Apostle Paul's farewell speech warned of "savage wolves" who would slip into the church at Ephesus and would twist the message that Paul taught them...

And here in Joshua's dying days, you feel a sense of urgency and warning. In fact, scholars point out an escalation in Joshua's words. He starts off serious and gets urgent and ends in the last paragraph almost in a panic. The reader wonders whether old Joshua is warning against failure or predicting it, (v.16) "WHEN you transgress the covenant..."

That word "transgress" is the word usually translated as "to cross" – like when they *crossed* OUT of the wilderness and into the Land. When they *crossed* the Jordan River; when they *crossed*

before the Ark of the Covenant and *crossed* before God's presence – it's maybe the theme word of the entire book – it's used about 75 times in this book – *but here Joshua uses it ironically* to really ratchet up this sense of crucial importance. He says, "Look – you crossed the river, you crossed into the inheritance, you crossed into your homeland BUT DON'T CROSS YOUR WEDDING VOWS... "when you transgress (lit. "cross") the covenant of the LORD your God..."

It's all a way of saying, "You who have now entered your inheritance *and YET have not* totally cleared the Land of the Gentiles who practice child-sacrifice... *You keep telling yourselves, 'Ah! What could it hurt to have a few of these pagans among us? They're really not that bad...* I mean, don't get me wrong, I'll NEVER be in favor of child-sacrifice but in many ways they're just like us... And there's this boy down the street – he's a pagan – but he's studying to be a attorney and if he wanted to date my daughter, I'd be ok with that... you know, obviously, no child sacrifice but he's really a polite kid and handsome..."

And Joshua is almost frantically warning – "NO! This is the fast-track to 'crossing the covenant' and it amounts to spiritual adultery. You may try to justify it in a million little ways but the reason our God is utterly opposed to our mixing with the nice pagans in the Land is *that this Land is to be like a spiritual operating theatre* – a sterile field where there can be no contagion... and we don't see it...we may think it's harmless but the religion of the Canaanites is like the "MRSA virus" – highly, highly contagious and deadly... you can't see it any more than you can see a virus with the naked eye – but I'm telling you..."

That's why this very serious, intensifying language, "Be very firm... cling to the LORD...take diligent heed ...don't intermarry...don't associate...don't even name their gods..."

Now, in this farewell address...a genre *common in the Bible...but there is also something UNCOMMON in fact "unique"*... The whole address is soaked in this unique quality not shared by any religion or moral or spiritual or self-help program and that is GRACE.

See, it'd be a terrible mistake to read this urgent farewell address and come away thinking, "Gee! These people had to walk on eggshells with this mean and stern deity who's apparently very hard to please... How could they possibly measure up?"

But the whole context of this address...as we'll see again next week... the whole HISTORY of this people is NEVER one of *their* MEASURING UP...They don't choose God and they never earn/deserve His favor and rewards or even the land of their inheritance.

The very basis for this farewell address is grace. It's been God's grace in the past, present and future -- v.1 "When the LORD had given rest to Israel ..." – See? Past GRACE! AGAIN, v. 3 "The LORD your God is He who has been fighting FOR you..." Past GRACE! Again in v. 10 "For the LORD your God is He who fights for you just as He promised you." Past GRACE!

There are repeated references to the foundation of their relationship to God – it's God's choosing them NOT on the basis of deeds they have done in righteousness (Titus 3.4-6) but by His choosing, His unprovoked love for them. He called Abraham. He rescued them from Egypt. He provided a lamb to substitute for them in the Passover. He baptized them in the Red Sea.

It's NOT "this-for-that" religion...not quid-pro-quo or karma-based religion where you do for the gods and then the gods do for you. It's not transactional self-help where it depends on your efforts to be good enough, *to look good enough*, to work/earn the approval of others so you can finally feel good about yourself.

This is incompatible with the religion of the Canaanites that's based on our sacrificing our sons and daughters so that Molech will take notice of us.

No! This is the God who gives HIS SON for those who don't notice HIM... This is the God who satisfies His own demands on behalf of those who can never measure up. This is the God who can't be bought – not the idols of this world who have to be carried and supported because they're powerless to save.

You see THIS is the God and Father of the Real Joshua, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and *He counts* His people worthy BEFORE THEY EVER MEASURE UP... and He attributes the obedience of Jesus Christ TO US...He rewards us for the WORKS OF SOMEONE ELSE... As if I actually did the works that Jesus Christ did... He commits to us before we ever commit to Him! It's grace – NOT deserving.

God points to past GRACE (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) and He points to future GRACE... as St Paul said in his own farewell speech:

And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are set apart for God. (Acts 20.32)

And does this God call us to obedience as He did with his people of old? YES! And is it difficult at times and do these words apply to us when Joshua said, "Be very firm to do what He says...cling to the LORD your God...take diligent heed to yourselves to love the LORD your God"? YES!

He calls us to obey Him because His way is the good and pleasant way... It's all an expression of our trust in Him and in His past, present and future grace.

He never calls us to obey ... or to work out our salvation but that He quickly rushes in with His promises, saying, "For I am at work IN you giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him." (Phi 2.13 NLT). He doesn't NEED our obedience.

And that brings me to the final point – this farewell speech is 1) a common genre in the Bible, 2) with an uncommon (actually UNIQUE) dynamic (i.e. grace!) and finally, there's a missing piece in Joshua's speech that makes all the difference.

I left out of my little genre survey THE most famous farewell speech in the whole Bible. It's a section in the Gospel According to John called "The Upper Room Discourse."

It's the farewell address given NOT by Joshua son of Nun, but by Joshua, the Son of God, Yeshua the Messiah... And there, Jesus Christ prepares His disciples for what they are about to see – His death.

The farewell speech of Joshua is missing something. We are waiting for him to name a successor like Moses did... as if to say, "I'm about to die and you'll lose your prophet, the one who speaks God's words to instruct and lead you but DO NOT FEAR! I've appointed so-and-so and he'll take it from here."

But it never comes... It's like the people are on their own and, you may know that in a generation or two it really began to unravel (that's the Book of Judges).

But IN the farewell speech of the Greater Joshua, Jesus Christ, He did indeed mention One who would take the baton and lead His people into a new and free obedience, changing NOT only our behavior but our hearts and motives. One who would lead by taking up residence WITHIN us...to conquer the Dark Continent inside us. Listen to Jesus Christ's promise: *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever: the Spirit of truth (John 14.15) ... it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. (Joh 16.7)*

See, the first Joshua couldn't make that promise, but the Last and Perfect Joshua gives us the Helper... and He (the Spirit) is not only at work claiming ground in my life... but empowers me to live in this transactional world where love and acceptance have to be earned and where there really is NO REST.

And He, the Helper, the Spirit of Truth and Holiness, He works in me to both LOVE MY NEIGHBOR and to resist the spirit of the age – the idols of our day that have to be bribed and supported... And He, the Spirit of Grace (Zec 12.10, Heb 10.29) is always at work, drawing all who believe to trust the Good News.

It doesn't all depend on ME! WOW! What a relief!

Maybe you've forgotten this...that it's not all dependent on your work and will-power – I hope you feel a new sense of relief.

OR maybe you've never believed in what Jesus Christ the greater Joshua has done... Believe it and find rest... and receive the Helper, pass your baton to Him and find forgiveness and new life and rest.