

Faithful Stewards Enjoying the Fruits of Their Labors

Joshua 22:1-9

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, October 20th 2024

A. Introduction

We all know that God calls us to hard work. It's just a part of our Reformed spiritual DNA. It's a part of what we call the dominion mandate. But some workaholics (like yours truly) need to be reminded from time to time that it is important to *also enjoy* the fruits of our labors. Joshua as a type of Christ taught the Israelites both sides of that equation of duty and pleasure. This book embodies a lot of work, sacrifices, and risks, but it also documents the *rewards* of those risks. For example, Joshua 5:11-12 talks about them enjoying the produce of the portion of the land that they had just conquered - and enjoying it on a daily basis. And they enjoyed times of relaxation and feasting every Sabbath and on the various festival days, which amounted to short vacations, right? They weren't workaholics. So there is a balance in this book. Not all rewards were deferred till the end of the war. Just as Jesus told His disciples to come aside and rest for a while, Joshua gave these hard working soldiers times of fun, rest, and relaxation. The weekly Sabbath is a routine of stopping our dominion and enjoying some of the fruits of that dominion - feasting, deserts (yay for deserts), fellowship, worship, and rest. But these nine verses show the *end goal of a longer-term vision* that had been set before them.

And I should clarify that these two and a half tribes retiring from the war did not mean that they retired from all labor. Not by a long-shot. Retirement does not mean that you stop taking dominion and just watch TV for the next several decades. In any case, back in Joshua 1:15 God told these tribes on the east side of the river that even though the conquest had been finished on *their* side of the river, they should continue to labor with their brethren until the West side of the Jordan had been largely captured. There is a corporate dimension of faithful labor that needs to be considered and a corporate dimension of enjoyment. So this morning I want to meditate on both sides of this equation - faithful labor and faithful enjoyment of the fruits of our labors. But obviously (from what you can see from the outline) I am going to be emphasizing the first half - the concept of faithfulness.

II. Evidences of faithfulness (vv. 1-4)

A. Your faithfulness is so obvious that others recognize it (v. 1)

First, if you are a faithful steward, you won't have to brag about it or showcase your faithfulness. It will be so obvious that others will recognize it. Verse 1 says, "Then Joshua called the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh." And we will be seeing in verse 2 that he calls everyone to recognize the accomplishments that these eastern two and a half tribes had made. It was obvious that they had lived up to their side of the bargain. You will remember that they had conquered their land 15 years earlier in Numbers

chapters 2-3. But rather than promptly settling down and enjoying the fruits of their labors prematurely, they continued fighting with the rest of the Israelites to ensure that they *all* could settle in Canaan. And it was obvious that they had gone above and beyond the call of duty. They had been faithful - more faithful than some of the tribes on the West side of the Jordan. The point is that faithful stewards don't have to brag about it. They are doing their work for God anyway, and they know God recognizes and will reward their labors. If others recognize them as well, that is a bonus. But they let their faithful deeds speak for themselves.

B. You don't have selective obedience to the Bible (v. 2a)

Second, they weren't selective in what parts of God's mandate that they participated in. Verse 2 begins, "and said to them, 'You have kept all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you'..." All. Faithfulness does not pick and choose which commands of God we will follow and which commands seem too difficult to follow. No doubt many soldiers from these eastern tribes had died while they were helping their brethren to inherit their land. This war was a risky business. But they stuck with the plan and executed all the plan.

This stands in such stark contrast to a King Saul many years later. He had selective obedience, and God rejected him from being king. Selective obedience needs to be called what it is - disobedience. That's what it is. And by the way, Initiative 434 is at best selective obedience. But I'll deal with that in a bit. But here's the question - Can it be said of you, "You have kept all that God commanded you"? That is one of the parts of faithfulness - faithfulness to the God of the Bible. That should be what we strive for. No double-mindedness and no selective obedience to the Bible. And being quick to confess when we have had selective obedience.

C. You don't have selective obedience to God-given human authority (v. 2b)

But verse 2 goes on to say, "and have obeyed *my* voice in all that *I* commanded you." Because the commands of Moses mirrored God's commands, to disobey Moses was to disobey God. You may remember that whereas individuals and families have maximum freedom to do anything not forbidden by God (what we call the normative principle), church and state are both held to a much more rigid standard. Church and state are governed by the regulative principle (that they can only do what God explicitly authorized them to do) - which makes for a very limited form of church government and civil government. And because Moses exemplified a civil government that stuck to the regulative principle, obeying Moses meant obeying God. As the leader of the nation, Moses only did what God had explicitly authorized.

Now, if Moses had commanded them to do something sinful, they would have disobeyed him, right? In fact, they would have had a *duty* to disobey. But since Moses exercised the Biblical authority that God-ordained magistrates were supposed to exercise, they didn't have to be selective in how to obey Moses or other civil magistrates under Moses. Moses was simply commanding the citizens to do what *God* had commanded within the civil realm. Civil governments must do the same in every age - even in the New Testament.

Romans 13 says that all civil magistrates must mirror God's commands. That's why Romans 13 calls the civil magistrate "God's minister." He is supposed to represent God's justice. Indeed, verse 1 of Romans 13 literally says, "there is no authority if not from God." A civil magistrate has no authority to command us to do something that God's law has not commanded. And when they command us to support something sinful, at that point they are no longer God's ministers. At that point they are at war with God.

Now, let me get myself in trouble and apply this to something going on in this election. We have a lot of political and religious authorities in Nebraska who are trying to bully us into voting in favor of Initiative 434 - pretending like it is a pro-life mandate. It is not. It is the very opposite. It is a scandalous contradiction of God's laws. Just yesterday I got yet *another* email from the Nebraska Family Alliance trying to convince me that Initiative 434 is *totally* Pro-life contrary to what some unnamed people have said. Of course, they failed to link to notoboth.org, since that would have undermined their narrative. But listen to the language of Initiative 434. If this is Pro-life, then the pro-life movement has abandoned its roots completely. It says, "Except [notice the highlight of the exception - it's the very first word - except] when a woman seeks an abortion necessitated by a medical emergency or when the pregnancy results from sexual assault or incest [so there are three exceptions], unborn children shall be protected from abortion in the second and third trimesters." When they got pushback because this Initiative allows for abortion in the *first* trimester, they responded that it is stopping abortion where it is at right now in Nebraska - at the first trimester, and keeping the other amendment from raising the ceiling and allowing even more abortions. They say that it is saving lives. When they got further pushback that the allowance of exceptions in the second and third trimesters is also ungodly, they responded with "No, the exceptions and the full allowance of abortion in the first trimester are *already* in the law so this wouldn't create new exceptions. We are just acknowledging the preexistence of such exceptions." My response is, "Initiative 434 isn't asking me to acknowledge bad law that already exist. It's asking me to approve it." But let's assume that it is just what they say it is. Let's think about that. Here's my response to them: "If, as you admit, the language of Initiative 434 is upholding the current status on abortion, and if that law was iniquitous before (which you have previously agreed that it was), then why would it not still be iniquitous for me to uphold that iniquitous law with my vote right now?" They responded that it could be changed in the future - this is just trying to keep the ceiling from being raised. But if that was the case, why make it *difficult* to change in the future by putting it into the Constitution? The fact of the matter is that voting for 434 is at *best* an *agreement by the voter* to keep the abortion laws the way they are (which I can't do). But notoboth.org gives 16 cogent reasons why this is actually far worse than current law. I'll just mention the first two of 16, and you can read the rest of their good arguments for yourself. 1. First, both 434 and 439 would put protection of the vast majority of abortions (probably more than 90%) right into the constitution since most abortions occur in the first trimester. Proverbs 17:15 says that God detests both those who acquit the guilty and those who condemn the innocent. And that's exactly what this language does. Isaiah 10:1-2 pronounces God's woes upon anyone contributing to writing iniquitous decrees. Anyone who votes in favor of this ammendment (whether intentionally or not) will be helping to write iniquitous degrees right into the constitution, and will come under God's woes - whether they profess Christ or not. I invite you to prove me wrong afterwards. 2. Second,

both Initiatives would subvert the Nebraska Constitution by no longer defining all human beings as being equal under the law. In other words, it actually makes things worse. Deuteronomy 16:19 commands civil magistrates, “You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality.” The very wording shows partiality. It is not equal protection. 3. And the website gives a bunch of other reasons.

Let me read the so-called Prolife Initiative again so that you can see this. This is important. This is coming up real soon. It says,

“Except when a woman seeks an abortion necessitated by a medical emergency [that’s a wide open door for abortions. Abortion clinics will simply begin to redefine new things - like psychological trauma - as a medical emergency - it goes on to say] or when the pregnancy results from sexual assault (now wait a minute - how does a sin against the mother make make it OK for the mother to murder the baby? The baby didn’t do any crime. Voting in favor would be voting to uphold that injustice. And by the way, some legal scholars have said that that phrase too is a wide open door for *any* unwanted pregnancy. If it was unwanted, it could be redefined by the mother as an assault. And notoboth.org shows other serious implications of that language. Anyway, the language goes on) or incest [OK, that’s a sin; but why does one sin justify murder of a totally different person? It goes on.], unborn children shall be protected from abortion in the second and third trimesters [which means that our constitution would say that unborn children are *still* not protected *by definition* in the first trimester].”

Why didn’t they make an Initiative to *abolish* abortion - just as God’s law calls for? First, they say that they don’t think the population is ready to do away with all abortion. Second, they say if we don’t hold the ceiling of the number of abortions right where it is by voting for 434, 439 would increase the number of abortions. So it is fear driven. The idea seems to be that we need to compromise on this Initiative because we fear if we don’t, things will get worse. But if it gets worse, the guilt of blood is on the hands of unbelievers; but if the church votes for this, the church will share in that guilt. In any case, Scripture says that fear is contrary to faith, and whatever is not of faith is sin. God’s not going to bless that. Why would He bless it?

Now, yesterday’s letter *did* go on to state that this Initiative 434 doesn’t stop the language from being further narrowed in the future. But two problems with that reasoning. If they wanted to be further restricted it in the future, why enshrine this language in the constitution, as Initiative 434 does? And secondly, what *might* happen in the future is irrelevant. The language allows for abortion *now* for *any* reason in the first trimester (*any reason*), and allows barn-door-wide exceptions in the second and third trimesters that God would not approve of. I am ashamed of the pastors and legislators who have backed it - some of whom I have consider to be friends. And I hope they will repent and change their minds. I simply do not understand the passionate support of Initiative 434. If you want to read more, go to www.notoboth.org. I think they explain it rather well. Churches (of all institutions) should be supporting *Biblical* morality; whereas Initiative 434 is going soft on the worst crime against humans possible. And by the way, the letter from Nebraska Family Alliance didn’t give a single Scripture to support their position. OK, enough on that rant.

But having said that a civil magistrate's (and a church's) commands should reflect God's commands (in other words, both halves of verse 1 should be mirrors of each other), we are not advocating for anarchy. We believe in submission to lawful authority - *lawful* authority. And God blesses submission to lawful authority even as He blessed these eastern tribes. If we truly are in submission to God, then we should find it no problem to be in submission to biblical human authority. People can deceive themselves into thinking that they do obey God, but when pastors give clear exposition of God's laws and command their congregants to obey God's laws, that's where people get their ire up. They say, "Who are you to tell me what I can and can't do?" And the pastor's answer should be, "I'm just the messenger boy. What I am telling you is clearly written in God's Word." Faithful pastors and faithful members take both sides of verse 1 seriously.

I believe that each of these points are necessary to a true definition of faithfulness. And if you vote for Initiative 434, I will not consider you to be faithful to God's Word. We need to replace the leadership of those prolife organizations with leadership that boldly stands for life without compromise. Stop funding these organizations. Even funding them is now sharing in their guilt. Put your money behind End Abortion Nebraska, which defines abortion exactly the way God does and seeks by faith to abolish abortion. If the whole church would do that, Nebraska would be different. I don't see how any church or state that supports Initiative 434 can claim to submit to the Regulative Principle of Godly Government, which means they have edged into overreach.

D. You are consistent every day (v. 3a)

But the next characteristic of faithfulness is consistency every day. Verse 3 begins, "You have not left your brethren these many days, up to this day..." They were consistent in their faithfulness; they persevered in their faithfulness. It was not fighting one day and playing hooky for two. They consistently stuck with their commitment day after day *until the job was completed*. And to me this is a good charge to children who start their chores but don't finish them. Anyway, we will see later that there were pockets of resistance that would require the western tribes to continue to fight, but the entire land *had* been possessed as far as boundaries were concerned. They owned the land. I mean, at one point they owned Jerusalem, and it was compromise that made them lose it.

In any case, their consistency can be broken down into three words: reliability, steadiness, and perseverance. They proved reliable in their duties, never leaving their posts. Do we do that at our employments? They proved steady in their task, not shirking their duty. Do we do that in our employments? And they persevered in their duty throughout the seven years of chapters 6:1-13:7, and the eight years of wrapping conquest up from chapter 13:8 to the end of the last chapter. That's 15 years devoted to conquest. That's a long time to persevere consistently in a difficult duty. And yet many of you have done that and more in your jobs. You have been faithful employees for most of your life. Consistency is an important part of faithfulness. And even if your boss did not recognize it, God does. Even if your boss did not reward it, God will. Believe it by faith. Claim it by faith.

E. You finish your duty (v. 3b)

And of course, finishing the job is also important. Verse 3 goes on to say, “but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God.” There is nothing more frustrating to a parent or an employer than to have those under them always doing a half-baked job and often not finishing the job. When we commit to a charge, we need to fulfill it to the best of our ability.

F. You are seeking the welfare of others (v. 4a)

Next, they were doing their duty because they were seeking the welfare of others. It was clearly not a selfish endeavor; it was not all about them. They were seeking the welfare of the *other* tribes. Verse 4 says, “And now the LORD your God has given rest to your *brethren*, as He promised *them*...” Until the rest of the tribes had entered into *their* boundaries, it was not time to give up. They were committed to seeing everyone blessed.

Did you know that more than half of the ten commandments relate to seeking the welfare of others and/or prohibiting what will damage the community? This is a lesson that church is not just about *us* and what *we* can benefit from. If that had been the attitude of these tribes, they would have left long ago. But they were seeking the welfare of everyone, and that requires sacrifice. That’s a part of the definition of faithfulness. Teach your children to serve others and to serve the Lord even if there is no immediate benefit accrued.

G. You are patient in receiving your reward (v. 4b)

And finally under this first point of faithfulness, they were patient in receiving their reward. Verse 4 finally gives permission for them to cross the Jordan to enjoy the land that they had long before possessed. It says, “now therefore, return and go to your tents and to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan.” It speaks to patience.

So what are the evidences of faithfulness? They are outward and so obvious that others can recognize that you are faithful. Faithfulness reflects being sold out to God, not selective obedience to the Bible. And it represents itself in obeying the *human* authorities that have been placed over them whenever and wherever they did not contradict the Word of God. Faithfulness is consistent, it seeks the welfare of others above our own, and it is patient. I think those first four verses are a marvelous description of what faithfulness looks like. It’s a great paradigm for training our children’s character. And I recommend that you discuss these points with your family at some time.

III. Nine ways to maintain faithfulness to the Lord (vv. 5-9)

But because faithfulness needs to be *maintained*, verses 5-9 give nine ways to maintain what they had already been faithful in.

A. Never let down your guard on Biblical ethics (v. 5a)

Verse 5 begins, “*But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you...*” This is a call to never let our guard down on Biblical ethics. There are so many ways that this can happen that the warning was well-placed. Laziness can make us put our guard down. So can lust and other forms of temptation. So can fear of man. So can tiredness. So can discouragement.

You might think that since these two and a half tribes had already shown themselves to be faithful for the past 15 years, *why on earth was there a need for this warning?* Well, Joshua knew human nature. It is easy to let our guard down when we have been successful. It happened to David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and so many other saints of old. Humility acknowledges that “there but for the grace of God go I,” and that realization makes us cling to the cross. Apart from grace, we are just as capable of serious sins such as David committed with Bathsheba and Uriah. So that’s the lesson I get from the first half of verse 5 - never let your guard down on Biblical ethics - no matter how many Christian leaders tempt you to compromise - and in this election we are being tempted to compromise. Satan’s kingdom certainly is relentless in its attacks upon us.

B. Do everything out of love for God (v. 5b)

Next, verse 5 admonishes them, “to love the LORD your God...” It is critical that we do everything out of a love for God - everything. Wash your car with appreciation to God for having enabled you to own that car, and letting Him know that you appreciate it and want to take good care of it. Do your work well so that others will see a tiny reflection of Christ in your work for your boss. Eat in a way that respects the body that God has given to you. Do everything out of love for God.

C. Have a God-centered ethical walk (v. 5c)

Next, have a God-centered ethical walk. Initiative 434 is not God-centered; it is fear centered; and fear is contrary to faith. So this point says, have a God-centered ethical walk. Verse 5 says, “to walk in all *His* ways, to keep *His* commandments...” These are God’s commands, not just the commands of Moses. And those are two ways of saying the same thing. You cannot claim to be walking in God’s ways if you have an antinomian philosophy - in other words, if your theology says that you are not responsible to keep God’s laws, and on the other hand you cannot claim to keep His commandments if you have good theology about God’s commandments but you don’t actually walk in them. So faithfulness to God definitely has an ethical dimension. And this is such a rebuke to the modern church that falsely claims that since we are under grace, we don’t have any responsibility to keep the law of God. But grace is not a license for sin. That’s a blasphemous take on the doctrines of grace. God’s grace was given to *restore* us to a joyful, and guilt-free, and judgment-free, and liberating kind of keeping of God’s laws. God’s laws were intended for our good. They are guardrails to keep us from falling off a cliff.

D. Stick to God like glue (v. 5d)

Next, verse 5 goes on to say, “to hold fast to Him.” Wow! What a wonderful admonition! We can’t possibly keep God’s laws if we don’t hold fast to God and to His grace. We need Him; every day we need Him. Some translations have “to cleave to Him.” The Hebrew has the idea of being stuck to God as if with glue. Francis Nichol renders it as “to stick firmly.” What are things that can unglue you from a close walk with God? You should identify those things and avoid them like the plague. No matter how attractive those might be to your flesh, you need to see those as mortal enemies of your soul. So Joshua tells them “hold fast to Him” or stick to Him like glue.

E. Put your whole heart and soul into serving God (v. 5e)

The next phrase says, “and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.” Wow! What a wonderful admonition! We should put our whole heart and soul into serving God. It’s talking about enthusiastic service. There should be nothing half-hearted about our Christianity. Serving God should be our greatest delight. And if it isn’t, ask God right now to *make* it the delight of your soul, and to get you unstuck from the world and stuck tightly to God. We should not be schizophrenic in our Christianity - serving the flesh with part of our life and serving God with part of our life. God needs to define everything we do, including our voting. Verse 5 says, “serve Him with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul.”

F. Seek God’s blessing through leaders (vv. 6-7)

Verses 6-7 could be summarized as seeking God’s blessing through their leaders. Verse 6 is a verbal blessing and verse 7 is a physical blessing. Verse 6 says,

So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.

When Gary and I pronounce a blessing upon you from the pulpit, take that blessing seriously. There is something that is being communicated from God through the leadership and to the people - purely out of God’s good grace. And the blessing isn’t simply invisible. It can include property, finances, and other tangible things that God loves to bless His faithful people with. So verse 7 says,

Now to half the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the other half of it Joshua gave a possession among their brethren on this side of the Jordan, westward. And indeed, when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he blessed them,

Notice that the physical things came between the two mentions of the blessing; they were part of the blessing.

G. Don’t disparage the physical blessings that God bestows upon you (v. 8)

And so I added a point about the blessing of *riches* since it is so often denied in the modern pietistic church. Verse 8 is a blessing that all of you can receive by grace. It says,

and spoke to them, saying, “Return with much riches to your tents, with very much livestock, with silver, with gold, with bronze, with iron, and with very much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren.”

Proverbs 13:22 says, “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.” God loves to bless the righteous through the industry of the wicked.

And by the way, even though these two and a half tribes on the east side of the Jordan were technically outside of the land of Canaan, they actually proved more faithful to God in those early years than some of the tribes who were on the west side - as chapters 23-24 will demonstrate. Don’t ever look down on riches as beneath God to bless you with. Riches are only a curse when we seek them apart from all the other blessings and especially when we seek them without having the faithfulness to God that this sermon has been focusing on. God loves to bless faithful people in tangible ways. May it happen more and more in this congregation.

H. Take dominion of all God has given you (v. 9a)

Next, we see that part of God’s reward included land - land which they were supposed to take dominion of. It says,

So the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession...

They were about to faithfully take dominion of all that God had given to them. In the next section we will see that they were *misunderstood* as not seeing all of that land as being under God; they were falsely accused. False accusations can happen to you. But history shows that they did indeed take dominion of all that God had given to them - to a far greater degree than at least some of the other tribes were going to do. It’s probably one of the reasons why God singles them out in this book for *special* recognition and doesn’t do the same thing with everyone.

I. Always recognize that your physical blessings come from God (v. 9b)

The last way in which they were to demonstrate their faithfulness to God can be seen in the last clause of verse 9: “which they had obtained according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.” This land was a gift from God. And we too must always recognize that our physical blessings come from God. If you have good health, see that as a blessing of the Lord. Don’t take it for granted. If the Lord gives you a house, see that as a blessing and a stewardship trust from the Lord. Don’t take any molecule of blessing that you are enjoying for granted. Be thankful to God for it and treat it as a stewardship trust. Yes, enjoy your physical blessings fully. God does not want us to be ascetics who avoid fun, food, land, and other physical blessings. But we are called to see them as blessings that the Lord gives and can take away at His pleasure. And in both cases we submit to His sovereignty and remain faithful servants.

IV. Conclusion

In church history there have been many defective views of money and comfort and land. Asceticism sees self-denial as an end in itself, and ascetics tend to glory in their pain and poverty - as if it somehow makes them more righteous. You could think of that as a *poverty mandate*. On the other extreme are some of the modern "Health and Wealth" churches that see health and wealth as a necessary sign of God's favor, and this prosperity gospel almost has a *prosperity mandate*. But neither a poverty mandate nor a prosperity mandate is Biblical. A *faithfulness mandate* is.

There are others who save like crazy so that they can be generous later - a laudible goal, but they have not been developing habits of generosity like Dorcas and other godly poor people in the Bible did in the meantime. I won't go through all the approaches to money that have failed to have a stewardship perspective. It's hard to define *when* to sacrifice and *when* to enjoy life when our standard is only me, myself, and I. But God's Word *does* give us the balance. God's word not only calls us to be faithful stewards, but it also calls us to know how to enjoy success - even on a weekly basis. Make sure that your family knows how to sacrifice, yes, but also make sure that your family knows how to thoroughly enjoy wine, food, gardens, yards, and other tangible things. I never get tired of enjoying sunsets.

This was a generation that had learned how to enjoy life *during* the daily grind of duty, but had *also* learned how to look forward to Sabbath rest and feasting at the end of each week, and to look forward to time off from work (which they had at every festival over the previous 15 years), and to not feel guilty when they splurged occasionally and began enjoying some of the wealth that God had already given to them. Yes, there is truth to the proverb of duty before pleasure (duty before pleasure - we need to teach our kids that), but we don't glorify God when we have duty *without* pleasure. Man's chief end is to glorify God in all that we do *and to daily enjoy Him forever* in whatever condition we find ourselves in. You don't wait to find that enjoyment till retirement. So those are the two main lessons of these first nine verses. May we live them out to His glory. Amen.