

God's Justice in Judgment

Joshua

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I thought we might return to the Psalms here at the start of 2015, but I decided that I wanted to go to the book of Joshua and kind of continue a little bit what we started as we studied the Pentateuch over the fall months. It didn't seem quite right to get to Deuteronomy and have the nation on the edge of entering into the Promised Land, and then leave them sitting there for a number of months. I decided to go to Joshua and kind of get the people into the land and see where it goes from there. One of the exciting things about this survey of the Old Testament is to just kind of get a big picture of the Bible and to see how the different books fit together and we're going to see that that often raises some knotty theological problems for us that we are happy to address and tonight is one of those nights.

The book of Joshua shows the historical fulfillment of God's promise to give land to the seed of Abraham. If you remember from our studies in Genesis, God promised to bring a great nation out of the loins of Abraham, and he promised to give land to his descendants in the general location of modern-day Israel. If you turn to Genesis 12 just to kind of get the gears loosened up in your mind so that we can remember exactly what we're talking about, Genesis 12:7, this is just a very quick and paltry review. Genesis 12:7, "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.' So Abraham built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him." Then if you turn over one chapter to chapter 13, verses 14 and 15, "The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever.'"

And as we saw in our study of Genesis, God renewed that promise to Isaac in Genesis 26, and to Jacob in Genesis 35, and about 400 years go by and God restates that oath to Moses. Look at the book of Exodus 3. We're just really getting a running start to move into Joshua here this evening. Exodus 3:8, you remember God is going to give birth to the nation of Israel now and they are in slavery in Egypt and have been for centuries. So God says in verse 8, "I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite." Now, this is a little foreshadowing here: notice that that

land is occupied. This was not a vacant piece of real estate that God was giving to them, there were peoples already living there who were going to be dispossessed. God makes that plain. We'll talk about that more in a minute. For now, look at verses 16 and 17 there of Exodus 3, "Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'"

So God made this promise to Abraham about 2,000 years before the time of Christ. I'm speaking in very round terms. Six hundred, 700 years go by and now he's speaking to Moses saying, "Now I'm going to bring you into this land that I promised." That's a long time to be waiting on a promise. In one sense, the people of Israel were probably a little bit like a kid waiting for Christmas, waiting, knowing that this promise is coming but waiting for the fulfillment to come, and generations come and generations go, and they live and they anticipate and they die without seeing the fulfillment in their own lifetimes.

Well, if you think about it, we're in a similar position today as New Testament believers. We're looking forward to the return of Christ. Christ promised us 2,000 years ago that he would return and come again, and we are still waiting for the fulfillment of that promise. Our expectation is not diminished. We're not discouraged by the passage of time because God has promised, Christ has promised, and we live in anticipation of that, the fulfillment of that promise, even though 2,000 years have passed since that promise passed from the infallible lips of our Lord. Well, that's just to give you a little sense of perspective of what it must have been like for a Jew in those days just before Moses, waiting for a long time, but yet a pious faithful Jew would still be saying, "I know that the Lord is going to bring us into the land even though centuries have passed since he made the promise." Well, there you go. God has promised and in Joshua he is about to deliver on that promise.

In Exodus, this is all pertinent to what we're going to see in Joshua in just a moment. Turn over to Exodus 34 because God in Exodus 34 told Moses what the nation should expect in the coming time of deliverance into the land, and this starts to zero in on the reality of the conflict that's going to take place. Those Canaanites and Hivites and Perizzites weren't going to just walk away and just forfeit and cede, as it were, c-e-d-e, cede their land over to these former slaves that showed up and said, "God has given us this land."

Exodus 34:11, God says, "Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite." Just like God had delivered them out of the land of Egypt by his mighty outstretched hand, by the strength of his omnipotence, now he's saying that, "I'm going to use that same power and deliver you into the land that I promised to you. So I have brought you out by power, I'm going to bring you in by power. You can be confident that the same power that delivered you from Egypt will also deliver you into the land that I have promised."

Now, I like to go back and forth between the Old Testament and the application to us today. Think about it this way; I want to build up your sense of anticipation of the return of Christ even as we're talking about the Old Testament land here. You think about it this way because the pattern of God, the principles of God, the way that God operates, is analogous and similar to us as it was for them in the Old Testament. God, by power, had delivered them from slavery and promised them that more was to come, and that by his power, he would do it. We know, standing on this side of history, that that's exactly what God did. He did deliver them into the land just as he promised that he would do. Now, for you today who want to know God, really, is the thing here. We're not just studying a text, we want to know the God who inspired the text and we want to understand what this means for our own spiritual lives, right? That's right. Thank you for that word of affirmation both of you. That's what we want. Now, here, I just want you to see the pattern here. God has delivered you as a Christian, God has delivered you from the supernatural blindness of your former way of life. You were dead in sin, you were blinded to the Gospel by the devil, you were under judgment, and yet God, by the strength of his spiritual omnipotence, moved in your heart, convicted you of sin, and opened up your eyes to the glory of Christ in such a way that you repented and turned to Christ for salvation. And he made you into a new creature, and he has forever forgiven your sin and brought you into his family, and that is the present position that you enjoy now as a child of God, as a born again Christian.

Now watch this, watch this: Christ has promised us that he will return for us, "I will come again," he says in John 14. "I will bring you to myself. I will bring you to the place that I am preparing for you." And so just as the Israelites before the conquest of the land were living on a promise having been delivered from slavery, they were looking forward to a promise yet to be fulfilled, in the same way, we have been no less miraculously delivered from sin. We are in a position of blessing and we are waiting on a promise yet to be fulfilled. And just as God fulfilled his promise to the Israelites and gave them the land, we know for certain, more certain than the fact that we'll live to the end of this service, we know for certain that God will fulfill his promise to one day have Christ return and receive us to himself so that where he is we may be also. So the great deliverance that God has given us spiritually is a down payment that should encourage our faith and should give us a sense of assurance and absolute confidence that the promises that are yet unfulfilled will one day be fulfilled, just like he did in the nation of Israel, so also in the life of the church. We are greatly blessed. We have received great blessing, great blessing is promised, we will certainly receive it because God keeps his promises.

Now, that was all a little bit of a detour there. Go back to Exodus 34. God said, "I'm going to drive out the Amorite," verse 11, now in verse 12, he warns the nation about their responsibility and what they must do in order to enjoy the blessing of this deliverance. He says, "Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim - for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God - otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and

they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods." God is warning them that when you go into this land, you must make a complete conquest and show no mercy. You must utterly destroy them and destroy the remnants of their religion so that you will not be compromised; so that you will not be sucked into the vortex of their paganism.

So the call to holiness and the call to separation is very strong and absolute here and it's going to involve military conflict for them to accomplish it. So God told them in advance what to expect and gave them a little bit of a foreshadowing in that portion of Exodus just after he had given the law, giving them a foreshadowing of what was ahead in their national future. So the promise to Abraham, let's say, round numbers, 2000 BC.; Moses, 1400 BC; "Now it's going to come to pass," God says. With all of that little bit of introduction, turn now to the book of Joshua 1. As we come to Joshua, the promise now is literally going to be filled in historical time and space just as the promise for Christ to return to us is going to happen in literal time and space. We will physically experience that with our own eyes and I can't wait for that great day to come when faith becomes sight. Here in Joshua, their faith is about to become sight.

Joshua 1:1, "Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, 'Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel.'" This is a momentous step forward in redemptive history. All of the centuries of waiting, all of the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, renewed centuries later to Moses, all of the deliverance out of Egypt and the great deliverance at the Red Sea and the slaughter of the Egyptian army, all of that leading up to this point in redemptive history so that, to say, "Go into the land." What we need to see as we read that verse is this is a massive step forward in the progress of God's dealings with his people.

In verse 3 he says, "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses." Just as I spoke to Moses. "From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory." North, south, east, west, God says, "I'm now giving it to you. It's time. It's time. After all of this waiting, it's time. Now move forward."

So Joshua, as we're going to see, we're going to do a character study of Joshua either next week or the week after. I haven't quite decided the sequence I want to do things. Joshua was greatly prepared for this moment. He had been by Moses' side in many key places of the book of Exodus as we'll see in coming weeks. Joshua was prepared for this moment, but I want you to put yourself in the sandals of Joshua for a moment, if you will. Here he is, the appointed leader of the nation; here he is, God has placed upon him the responsibility, "Joshua, you lead my people now so that I could fulfill my promises that I made to the fathers centuries ago. You bear the responsibility to lead them into the land."

And if you think about it, and you just think about it as a spiritual man as Joshua was, the weight of that moment must have been quite intense; perhaps a sense of anticipation and eagerness, but also a sense of fear and a sense of the magnitude of the moment. You know, there aren't many great, really truly great moments in life, are there? We go through life and there are, you know, and most of our life is consumed with the day-to-day routine and that's okay, that's the way God designed it, but when a great moment comes, a great man of God, a great woman of God, has to step up and rise to the occasion of that moment. Well, God here in Joshua 1, is strengthening Joshua for that task.

As you think about it and look at what God said to him, there must have been a sense of fear in his heart of some kind, a sense of dread, because look at the promise that God makes to him, he said, "You go into the land," and now in verse 5, he says, "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you." The promises of God are strengthening him in a task that he might, in his flesh shrink back from, the promises of God are strengthening him to move forward. And in the same way, you, as a Christian here today, you and I as believers in Christ in this room, whatever the challenges that you may be facing and for some of you I know that they are steep and they are difficult or they are heartbreaking, you are meant to draw upon like promises from God and rise to the occasion and display what it means to be a man of God, a woman of God, in the midst of the challenges that you're facing. God is with you so that you can do that. God is with you so that you would not shrink back in fear or despair, but that you would rise up and step up to the challenge and say, "In this challenging time of life, in this challenging moment of life, I will step up and display before God, display in the presence of Christ, display in the presence of the elect angels, what it means to be a godly man or woman in a world that is filled with sorrow and difficulty. I will not shrink back. I will not be afraid. I will be strong and courageous." Well, this is what God calls his people to and it's no less magnificent in your life in the situations that God has appointed for you, it's no less magnificent for you to rise to the occasion than it is for Joshua to rise to the occasion as well because the same principle of trusting the promises of God is what's at work.

So, look at Joshua 1:6. God tells Joshua, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them." Wow. Wow. Just think about that. The magnificence of the promises that God gave first to Abraham when Abraham was a single man of 100 years old married to a barren wife, now a nation, as God promised, has come out of his loins and Joshua has received the mantle and God tells him, "You are my agent in advancing the course of redemptive history. You are my man for this hour." It's magnificent to contemplate.

As I said, we're going to see how Joshua was prepared for this moment, but God strengthens him and in like manner, he strengthens you with these same words, verse 7, "Only be strong and very courageous." Be strong and very courageous, Christian, today, in your faith in Christ. Be strong and courageous that the Lord will be faithful to you even if the answer seems remote and inaccessible to your human eyes. Be strong and be very courageous. Live as though this has already happened. Live as though God has

already displayed his faithfulness to you because he will, it is certain, it's just a matter of experiencing it in time.

Now, going back to verse 7. God, speaking to Joshua, tells him, and given the context of what we saw from Exodus 34, this starts to make more sense to us, God says, "be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go." The path of success, Joshua, is the path of obedience. The path of success for you, Christian, is the path of obedience and fidelity and loyalty to Christ.

Verse 8, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success." And God speaks to him; having strengthened him with promises, he now commands him. Verse 9, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." He says, "You don't need to know all of the details of the future. What you need to know is that I am with you. Knowing that, now go forward and be strong and very courageous."

I love it. I love it. You get a sense, once again, of the nobility of the life of being a disciple of the Lord God of the Bible; a sense that Christianity is not meant to produce weak kneed disciples. We're not meant to be a shriveling bunch of people nursing and licking our spiritual wounds that have accumulated over life. We are meant to be strong and courageous. We're meant to live a life and display a confidence, a certainty about the outcome of the events of life, a sense of confidence because we are confident in the fact that the Lord is with us. Jesus said at the end of Matthew 28, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." When we think about the fact, you know, we're three years into our new church now and, by the way, I'm always going to do my absolute best to make a distinction between the church, which is us, as opposed to the building in which we are meeting; try to make a separation in your mind between the church being the people and the building in which the church meets. But as I look forward to the future of what happens now, now that we're in our position, I'm absolutely looking forward to what happens. There is no sense of fear. There is no sense of dread. I am confident about what the Lord has for us. I don't know what that's going to look like. I'm not going to promise hundreds or thousands of people coming here. I don't even care what the numbers are. I just know that God will be faithful to us because we have stepped out in obedience to his word and with a singular, sole, simple desire, "God, we want to hold up your word high and lofty for whoever will hear." And in that, we are confident. We're not afraid of what the future holds. Well, in a much, much greater way, Joshua was called to courage as he went into battle.

Now, with all of that said, let's lay out the physical aspect of what is about to take place in the book of Joshua. Israel had to eradicate, eliminate, eviscerate, how many "e" words can I get going here? I don't know. Israel had to eradicate the Canaanites so that they would not corrupt the people of God with their false religion, and the eradication was to

be severe, and this is where some of the challenge, the theological challenge of the book of Joshua comes up.

Look at Deuteronomy 7. We'll go back now. Joshua is commanded to go forth into the land here in Joshua 1. Well, we're going to do a little bit of a flashback now to the book of Deuteronomy and turn to Deuteronomy 7 so that we have an appreciation of what it is that Joshua was called to do. We'll look at three passages. We could and probably should look at several others, but time will fail us if we do. Deuteronomy 7:1. I love the way all of this fits together. I love the fact that things that you read as you go through your Bible reading plan, that just kind of seem disconnected. I love opportunities like this to bring it all together and we see the harmony and the continuity of Scripture right before our very eyes in undeniable ways.

Deuteronomy 7:1, "When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them," here it comes, "then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you."

Turn to Deuteronomy 12:2, "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. You shall tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and burn their Asherim with fire, and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods and obliterate their name from that place."

Chapter 20, verse 16. Verse 16 especially sets it in stark terms. Sorry, let's go back to verse 15 to help set the context there. "Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations nearby. Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God."

So there is utter destruction. There is going to be war, and in that war, these people will be obliterated. Israel is commanded to annihilate them and kill them and eliminate them. That's pretty severe. We're not necessarily used to always thinking about the God of the Bible that way, and this raises a challenging question for us, a challenging question that some raise: there are writers who would say and have said that the God of Joshua is nothing like the God of the New Testament. This God of war, this God of a locality and a

God of battle, is nothing like the God of the New Testament revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, what do we say to those kinds of things? Here's part of the problem: some, perhaps some of us in our weakness and before we've really thought through things, and it would be easy to picture these Canaanites as unsuspecting folks who were merely minding their own business when suddenly a hostile foreign army shows up and demands to take their land from them. Someone might picture Omar, the Canaanite, standing on his patio and flipping camel burgers in his backyard grill, and suddenly an army shows up, as if the Canaanites were suburban Americans just trying to mind their own business without giving much thought to God. On what moral basis does Israel slaughter the nations? On what moral basis do the people of God go into a land and kill everybody that was there first? How is that just? How is that consistent with the righteousness of God? How are we to think about these things?

Well, let me give you three points to kind of hang your thoughts on as we go through this. We're going to spend a couple of more weeks on Joshua. We won't cover everything tonight, necessarily. But let me say this: apparently, the glory of God is more important in the life of men. Apparently, the fidelity and sanctification of God's people is more important than the nations that would undermine that sanctity. As we've seen in the passages, God says that these nations need to be exterminated so that their corrupt religion will not corrupt you as my people. And while unbelieving people might come with a hostile attitude toward the Bible and say men shouldn't be treated this way, that human perspective is totally the wrong way to look at it. It's totally going at it from the wrong starting point. The correct starting point is not, "What about these Canaanites?" The correct starting point is, "What is the glory of God?" This is how we have to start. We have to align ourselves with the character and the purposes of God and what God in his righteousness has purposed and what God in his righteousness wants to occur by definition, is the preeminent priority, and by definition, it is righteous. By definition, it is righteous.

Let's just lay out three aspects of this situation that gives the moral basis for it so that we feel strengthened in our faith and have a sense of proper understanding so that we see this from God's perspective, not from a humanistic perspective that has gotten so bad that parents aren't even supposed to spank their children anymore. Well, if you've got a problem with spanking children, imagine the moral cataclysm it is for people to encounter the holiness of God in display of the annihilation of nations as our culture is totally unprepared and ill-equipped to deal with these issues. You know, save the trees and kill the babies. You know, it's crazy, but whatever.

First point: remember the sovereignty of God. Remember the sovereignty of God, and this really cuts right to the chase of all of it. This is why men object. They do not want God to be free and sovereign in his reign of the world that he created. God is the Creator therefore, by definition, he has authority over his world and over his creation that he has made. God is the Creator of man. By definition, God has the right and prerogative to determine the destinies of men and the destinies of nations. That is his free prerogative that man is not in a position to challenge and say, "Why do you do it this way?"

God has authority over nations. Scripture says that he bestows authority on whom he wishes, Daniel 4:17. Daniel 2, I won't have you turn there. Daniel 2:20-21 says, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings." And so God is so sovereign, God is so much the King of creation, that it is his prerogative and his alone to determine when a nation rises and when a nation falls. It is not the place of any man, anywhere, in any time to question that, to question the righteousness of God in what he does with his creation. We must step back, as it were, when we come into this realm of his sovereignty, we step back and say, "God, that's your realm. I step back. I withhold my judgment. I silence my tongue." As Habakkuk 2 says, "Let all the earth fall silent before Him." We fall silent before the sovereignty of God and we tremble in fear when we see on the pages of Scripture or played out in our own lifetimes where God says it's time for this nation to come down. That's his prerogative because he is sovereign and it is not our place to say, "God, why are you doing that?" as if God had to answer to our moral standard, as if our pattern of thinking was that which would subject the reign of God to our dictates. That is utterly sinful to think that way. People that think that way need to totally abandon their whole mindset, their whole set of priorities, their whole prism through which they interpret life, they have to have a radical reorientation of their thinking before they can begin to think properly about such things.

So this is an immediate conflict with worldviews and, as Christians, as those who desire to be faithful to God, faithful to the Christ who saved us, faithful to the word of God that we love, we can't back away from declaring that. We engage this conflict. I have a friend who is a Navy SEAL. He loved talking about military tactics. He's a fine Christian man, a pastor in Colorado now. One of the things that he said is that when you come under sniper fire, enemy forces are firing at you, you start firing your own weapon and go straight to the source of the conflict. You don't run from it. You don't hide from it. You just go straight into the line of fire and you fire back with your own weaponry.

When we see this conflict come up and we engage this in books or the thinking of neighbors and friends and whoever we might interact with, we need to assert the sovereign prerogative of God to rule his creation as he sees fit, and if God commands his people to go into a nation and dispossess a land, then we are on God's side because God is sovereign and we, as born again Christians, have bent the knee. We have received him as our own sovereign Lord and we gladly acknowledge his sovereign reign over the totality of creation and to allow him the prerogative to determine the destinies of men, of nations, as he sees fit. That's how great God is. That's how powerful he is. So we begin our thinking by recognizing the free prerogative of God to deal with nations as he sees fit. That's point 1, the sovereignty of God.

Now point 2: the self-disclosure of God. The self-disclosure of God by which I'm referring to the fact that God has made himself known. He has revealed himself and this is going to be hopefully very helpful. Despite what some critics would have us to believe, God, while he has the sovereign right to be arbitrary if he wants to, God was not arbitrary in his judgment of the Canaanites. What came upon the Canaanites was the proper fruit of their chosen lifestyle and Scripture makes this very abundantly clear and history confirms

it as well. Here's what is easy to miss; if you've read through the book of Joshua a few times, it's easy to have missed this: the Canaanites had heard the word of God and they rejected it. It's very clear. It's very evident.

Look at Joshua 2. They had a surprising amount of revelation given to them and they bucked against it. They tried to silence it. Joshua 2:1, "Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho.' So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there." So Joshua sends spies ahead in the human dimension of the battle so that they know what to expect when they begin the invasion.

Now, watch this, verse 2, "It was told the king of Jericho, saying, 'Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.'" The sons of Israel. There were representatives of the living God on their turf, and what did he do with them?

Verse 3, "the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, 'Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.'" He intended to kill them. "Bring them out," he says, "they are spies." He says, "Bring them out and we're going to execute them." And so here they are, he knew who these men were and he wanted to stop them. Well, how much did the people of Jericho know? They knew a lot. They knew a lot. They knew enough that they should have known better than to oppose these men.

Look at what Rahab says in verse 8, and I'm presuming your knowledge of the story. Rahab hid the spies, verse 8, "Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men," so Rahab, a citizen of Jericho, comes and tells them what she knows about them and about their God. She says, "I know that the LORD," and she uses the name Yahweh, the covenant keeping name of God, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you." Verse 10, "We," not just I, we as a people, "we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath."

They knew who God was to the extent that he had disclosed himself up to that point. In the progress of revelation at that point, God had made himself known to these Canaanites. They knew him by his covenant keeping name of God, of Yahweh. They knew that God had delivered Israel from Egypt. They knew the miraculous deliverance. They knew that he had powerfully worked and protected and acted on behalf of his people. But they didn't repent. They didn't come, except for Rahab, in a drop of God's mercy on this people, he shows mercy to Rahab, but as a people, they did not come and say, "Oh, tell us about your God. We realize we are a wicked people. We realize that God has made himself known through you. Come and let us be saved too. Let us join with the people of God." When they had representatives on their soil, they wanted to kill them. That's

culpable. That's morally culpable for them to respond in that way. Rahab shows that the inhabitants understood for many years the redemptive acts of God on behalf of Israel and yet they still rejected the spies and would have killed them if only they had found them. There was no sense of repentance. There was no receptivity to this God who had obviously distinguished himself in the actions of nations, in his power to overthrow kingdoms on behalf of his people. They didn't repent.

Further, there's another aspect to this, a passage that we go to often, turn over to Romans 1 for a moment. Romans 1. There's more coming here. Romans 1, beginning in verse 20. They had not only the testimony of what they knew from historical reports, they had the testimony of creation written on their hearts as well. Notice how the Apostle Paul puts it in a time reference that would include the Canaanites, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened." You cannot blame God that the Canaanites rejected what they knew. It's fitting that they should be judged for rejecting the truth.

This gives us a sense and it shows us how, the fact that this is even an issue, the fact that some of you are probably even struggling to accept what I've said here tonight about this point, it shows how much we have been conditioned to diminish the value of the revelation of God. They had heard and yet they didn't respond. When God's revelation comes to people, even though they don't take it seriously, even though they don't turn to it, what you and I need to understand is that there is a great moral act that is taking place there. God comes to a man and makes himself known, makes his revelation apparent, brings it to the attention of the mind, and when someone just flicks that away, treats it as something common and profane and unholy and unworthy of their time, oh, oh, it makes me shiver in fright to realize that that is what the majority of people do with the revelation of God. They treat it as something contemptible, not worthy of their time and attention, certainly nothing that they would turn their life and submit to. Well, look, the fact that that is the common reaction of humanity to the revelation of God is no indication that that's a justified response. From God's perspective, his revelation should be revered. His revelation should be believed. It should be submitted to. And when men refuse to do that and they suppress the truth in unrighteousness, there will be a day of accounting that comes to them as a result.

People have no idea, they have no sense whatsoever, that there are massive eternal consequences to what goes through their mind and how they respond when a Bible is opened to them. And the fact that they treat it lightly doesn't mean that God treats it lightly, and as we're thinking through the value of the revelation of God, whether it's in his creation or in his word, the fact that mankind in sin trivializes it, diminishes it, dismisses it and dismisses us when we bring it, that doesn't mean that we adopt or sympathize with their attitude. We align ourselves with God who says that his word is precious, that his word is like a fire, it's like a rock, and we respect the revelation of God and we defend his honor and we defend his justice when people say, "But, it didn't seem

that important at the time." It's just a reflection of their own lost condition. God had made himself known to these nations and they had turned away. They had rejected it.

Let me give you a contrast to help you think through it, a biblical contrast. You remember the story of Jonah, right? The fifth book of the 12 minor prophets? Jonah 3, what happened when Jonah went into Nineveh and he said, "Forty days and this city will be overthrown"? What happened? They repented, didn't they? In sackcloth and ashes. That pagan city repented en masse at the preaching of Jonah and Jesus said in Matthew 12, he commended their faith. He said, "They'll rise up and condemn other generations because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. Something greater than Jonah is here," he said. That's what even pagan nations should do at the preaching of the word of God. The Canaanites didn't do that. There was consequences. When Nineveh repented, God showed mercy to them. When pagans reject the word of God, he displays his holy justice and he is right and righteous when he does because we don't trivialize the self-disclosure of God. Rahab trembled and asked the spies to be kind to her. That's what the whole nation of them should have done but they didn't.

Now, there's one more aspect of this, point 3 here this evening: the sin of the nations. We've seen the sovereignty of God, the self-disclosure of God, and now we see the sin of the nations. In addition to what we just said about them rejecting and not listening to the revelation of God and responding to what was made known to them, their sin is a documented fact of history. You and I should not think of these Canaanites as innocent bystanders on the stage of world history. That's not true. That's not true at all. They were spiritual perverts. One historian writes and I quote, "Canaanite religion was an extraordinarily debasing form of paganism. Their goddesses are portrayed as sacred prostitutes. Pregnant mothers were bloodthirsty goddesses of war who delighted in butchery and sadism. As in all such religions, numerous debasing practices including sacred prostitution, homosexuality, and various orgiastic rites were prevalent." Compare that historical background with the scriptural record which says the exact same thing.

Turn over to Leviticus 18, beginning in verse 22. There is an aspect of your spiritual affections that I want to appeal to tonight in this. There is a desire that I want to isolate in your mind that I know is there and I want it to come forth and flourish. When the honor of God is attacked, you and I as Christians should want to rise to the occasion and appreciate the opportunity to defend it. That's what we're doing here tonight. Many people have questioned the God of the Old Testament whether he's a just God, whether he's a loving God or not, and do so in derisive, mocking terms. Well, when we hear that, that's like a trumpet call to battle for us. Let the people of God when that happens say, "I'm going to rise to the occasion and say what I can to the realm of people that I can that that's not true. That I'll stand for the glory of God. I'll stand for the honor of God. I'll defend the honor of God before men no matter what kind of mockery comes my way as a result." That's what I want us to be like, and Scripture addresses these things, and recognizing the postmodern culture in which we live, recognizing that people today in our culture don't even want a principle of absolute truth at all, let alone an absolute truth that says God is a holy God who judges sinners, we're not going to get sucked into that

vortex of falsehood, we're going to separate ourselves and stand for the truth, and Scripture gives us everything that we need to be able to do that.

Leviticus 18:22, in the midst of what's called the holiness code, God giving instruction to Israel says, "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion." You'd like to think that this kind of instruction wasn't even necessary but we know from our own culture that it is, and the fact that this was necessary even in the day of Moses tells us that what we're seeing today is really nothing new and so we don't need to get too bent out of shape by it as if it was something new, never experienced before in the history of mankind.

Now, look at verse 24, speaking to his people, God says, "Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for," here's my reason for calling you to that aspect of separation and sanctification, "for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. The land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants." Whoa, does that ever change the perspective of things. These Canaanite people as part of their religious practices, practiced homosexuality and bestiality. This is utterly dark and depraved. There is no redeeming that. This can only call forth judgment.

Deuteronomy 18:9, notice how God pronounces judgment almost incidentally as he is giving instruction to his people. Verse 9 of Deuteronomy 18, "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire." God says to Israel, "We're not going to do human sacrifice here. They do, we don't." "One who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you." God, as it were says, "I am fed up with their sick, demonic religion and it is time for me to silence it. The sin of these nations has come to the full and I am going to put an end to it as is my sovereign prerogative."

Now, notice something incidentally here: the moral law of God was the basis for judging these people and they were guilty even though Moses hadn't revealed all of these things. They had been practicing these things before Moses gave the law to Israel and they were guilty all the same. The moral law of God was in effect and written on their consciences and was a proper basis for judgment as they did these things even before Moses wrote them down at Sinai. The moral law of God is universal in nature and only the most obtuse, self-willed, stubborn, insistent, rejection of obvious natural truth could lead anyone to any other conclusion. "Not just in that sexual realm, but why would you consult the dead on behalf of the living," Scripture says.

Now, let's kind of bring all this together. That kind of introduces us to Joshua and defends and vindicates, hopefully to some extent, the justice of God in the judgment of

nations. Let's wrap this up and kind of bring it around to the Gospel here tonight and for us to think through the implications of what Scripture teaches. Jesus talked about in Matthew 25 that "these will go away into eternal judgment." Scripture speaks of an eternal hell that awaits those who reject Christ; who reject God's word; who pursue the darkness of the sin of their own hearts; and who stiffen their necks against truth. Well, look, the same things that we've talked about here tonight that would vindicate the justice of God in dealing with the sin of nations, is the same basic principles by which we defend the sense of eternal hell. God is the sovereign Creator and it is no light thing to violate the eternal law of an eternal God. It should, an eternal law calls forth eternal punishment and it is right and it is proper and it is righteous for God to uphold his law and to vindicate it. When the creature violates the standard and the character of the Creator, there must be consequences for justice to be upheld. So the fact that the idea of eternal judgment is mocked and hated and despised by men who are sinners, has nothing to do with the justice of it. Just as I said at the beginning, we start and we look at these things and we evaluate these things from the starting point of what God has declared to be true in his word and from the standard of his holiness and from the inerrancy of his word, and we let that word define for us what justice looks like to sinners rather than letting sinners define for us what the justice of God should look like. We have to know where our starting point is and we have to reason from there even when it brings us into direct clash with the culture in which we live. We must think about these things biblically and not according to the spirit of our age. The God of the Bible is indeed the holy Creator of the universe. He will hold men individually accountable for how they respond to his revelation.

As we look out on the world around us, we can see that it is of great consequence that men have turned away from God's revelation and embraced the darkness of the occult, sexual perversion, and false religion. Beloved, I'm telling you that which I know you already know, believe and embrace, but we need to say it publicly from this pulpit often: God hasn't changed and wickedness brings judgment, and the consequences are far too devastating and eternal in scope for us to do anything but tremble at; to step back in holy fear. And so you and I must respond to the spirit of our age by defending the justice of God in his judgment. He is right in what he does. He is the sovereign God who has revealed himself in the word, the written word and the incarnate Word. Men are utterly without excuse, and on that we will stand, and from that perspective, we would gladly proclaim the Gospel even to some of you tonight, that in the midst of the righteous judgment of God, the clarion call of grace goes out, Christ crucified and resurrected for sinners, Christ calling men saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation. Come out of that wicked world and come to me for salvation," Christ would say. Come out and come to Christ. Flee that which would bring about the destruction of your own eternal soul. Why would you perish?

Beloved, the promise of God is a blessing upon those who would come to Christ, at the same time, there is a severe warning as well. If the Canaanites would be judged for rejecting news of the Red Sea, the language of Hebrews, how much severer judgment will come upon those who despise the blood of Christ and deem him unworthy of coming to for salvation. It's serious. The consequences are great and doesn't that make you glad as a Christian to realize that God has had mercy on you? Doesn't that make you glad?

Doesn't it make you joyful? Doesn't it make you want to sing as a believer to realize that somehow for reasons known only to him, God laid his hand on me and had mercy on me and brought my soul out of the destruction that I myself deserve and now I stand in the grace of God. What a great salvation. What a great Savior Christ must be. How perfect must be his blood that washed away his sin. How joyful and how confident I am as I look to that time when he returns for his own. Against the black backdrop of God's judgment on sinners and those who reject him, we stand in grace. We stand in the favor of God. We sing as those redeemed by the blood. How great is our position of grace.

Let's pray together.

Father, we do gladly defend your justice and we gladly submit to the totality of your revelation. We have no interest whatsoever in qualifying all that you have set forth in your word. Father, we thank you for our salvation and, Lord, we grieve for those who do not yet know you. We are concerned for them. We know what you say about judgment and it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Father, for perhaps one or two or three or four here this evening, we ask for your mercy to be extended to them, that as they wrestle through these things in the hours to come, that you might graciously lay hold of their hearts and open their minds, open their eyes to Christ. May they flee to Christ, crying out for salvation, that they might be spared from the wrath that is to come. Lord, we honor your word to the best of our ability. We ask you to forgive us where we fail and fall short in our fidelity to your word and, Lord, where we sin in word and thought and deed. Father, even the sins of this day, we bring them to you and confess them. We want to be as far away from sin as we can. It clings to us. We ask you that in the same mercy that first brought us to Christ, that you would forgive and cleanse us that we might walk out of this place rejoicing and singing the goodness and the grace of our holy and righteous and gracious God. So Lord, thank you for our time together. Bless us now as we sing. Help us to sing out, Father, as though we really meant the words that we are about to sing together. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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