

An Anatomy of Faithfulness

Joshua 4:10-14

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, September 18th 2022

Introduction - review

Last week we saw the importance of memorials. Those who don't know their history can easily be manipulated by tyrants. And that has certainly been happening today. There is a reason why tyrants of the past have sought to revise history and to replace historical monuments with their own monuments. It is the same reason that the modern critical theory movement has been defacing or removing any monuments that remind them of absolutes, authority, law, limits to civil authority, the Biblical basis for liberty, or anything else that stands against the ideals of Marxism. It's got to go. They have been successful in replacing good history books with revisionist history. They have been successful in injecting relativism into every subject, including mathematics. So we saw that remembering the past helps us to be well-grounded in the present and gives us motivation for the future.

Today we are just going to slice off a smaller slice of the bread of life (verses 10-14). And even though these verses teach additional lessons related to memorials, I think I have dealt with that subject sufficiently. Instead, I want to focus on the subject of faithfulness. This is a beautiful snapshot of what grace-generated faithfulness should look like.

I. Faithfulness that is thorough (v. 10)

Verse 10 says,

So the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the LORD had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua; and the people hurried and crossed over.

This verse starts by showing that the priests were faithful to do their job and it ends by saying that all the people were faithful to do what they had been told to do, and in between it gives some maxims of what faithfulness should look like. We saw last week that it would have taken courage for the priests to stand their ground as the water kept piling up higher and higher in the air to an estimated height of 120 feet. Bruce Waltke and other commentators point out that this put the priests right by the point of danger.¹ And especially on the literal translation, there was a menacing wall of water right next to them. Indeed, it was the Lord of the ark who was holding back the water. But to stand still right beside that wall of water while 3 million people marched over would have taken stamina as well. It was after all a very heavy ark completely covered with gold. That's heavy. Even at a fast pace, it would have taken from dawn to dusk for

¹ Waltke says, "The point is that the Lord and his priests remained at the place of danger, not the people who hurried over." Bruce K. Waltke, "Joshua," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 241.

all three million people to cross the river. You can do your own math. Based on a much lower estimated population, one commentator said,

Someone figured that if 2,000 Israelites per minute crossed the Jordan it would take eight hours for a million to cross the Jordan. This does not include the livestock which would not be the fastest moving bunch. Actually they had to move faster, for the population of Israel was more like two million or more. Whatever the pace, the priests had to stand a long time—at least all day—in the Jordan. This would require much patience in any situation but so much the more with the idea of the waters coming back upon them causing great concern.²

It's easy to just slide over those words, but those priests are a model for leaders today. And they modeled more than courage. As this author suggested, it modeled endurance, patience, and willingness to embrace inconvenience. It would have been very inconvenient to keep holding that heavy ark for hour after hour. Are we leaders willing to bear inconvenience?

And the verse ends by showing the obedience of the people. As commanded in chapter 3, verse 4, they kept a respectful distance of 2000 cubits from the ark. That meant they crossed about 1000 yards downstream from where the priests were standing.

But I love the little detail that the Lord includes: it says that they hurried. The author I just quoted suggested two reasons for their hurry. One suggestion is that, seeing the sweating priests holding the heavy burden for so long motivated the people to hurry so as not to put unnecessary stress on the priests, who wouldn't want to be carrying this for more than a day. Another suggestion is that they knew that they had to hurry to get over before nightfall. On any calculation of the crossing it would very difficult to get 3 million or so people across the river during daylight hours, and to be able to cross with their carts, animals, and supplies. So they were diligent and speedy about their obedience, and it may be that they were also considerate of the comfort and welfare of their leaders.

But I especially want to focus on three additional phrases in that verse that highlight the faithfulness of these leaders and people. First, it says "until everything was finished..." This is a maxim for faithfulness. I'm going to give you several maxims of faithfulness in these five verses that are not listed in your outline. But this phrase shows that we should do our duty until everything is finished. When our kids did chores, we did not want them doing a half-baked job. We wanted a job well done and a job fully done. How many tasks get started but never finished? When that happens there is probably mismanagement of time or resources. And that's not a good thing because the Lord does not entrust more stewardship resources to us until we are faithful at taking care of what He has already entrusted to us. Keep that phrase in mind - "until everything was finished..." It should be a maxim for our definition of faithfulness.

The second maxim for faithfulness is following orders to the t. It says, "until everything was finished *that the LORD had commanded Joshua to speak to the people...*" Yes, the orders of all leaders must be grounded in the Word of God, but God's Word commands leaders to speak

² John G. Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor: Joshua*, Analytical Bible Expositor (Clinton, IA: LBC Publications, 2010), 39.

those orders to the people. It's not a popular concept nowadays, but it is biblical. There is a chain of command in family, church, and state. That chain of command goes from God to leader to people. I've got Facebook friends who bristle at that idea and absolutely reject any idea of a chain of command. Well, they are going to have to ignore hundreds of Scriptures. So this clause speaks to the faithfulness of leaders to communicate God's Word to the people. But it also speaks of the faithfulness of followers to be willing to be disciplined in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. When the Word of God is preached from this pulpit or shared one-on-one in discipleship, mentoring, or counseling, members need to be willing to follow the commands of the Lord and not treat them lightly. Scripture elsewhere defines a faithful person as a person who trembles at God's Word. He takes it seriously. He follows orders to a T.

The third maxim of faithfulness is not picking and choosing what commands of God we will obey. The third clause says, "according to *all* that Moses had commanded Joshua." Notice the word "all." Imagine a father or mother who has given a list of four reasonable things for a daughter to get done by the end of the day: Clean the bathroom, cook one of the meals, iron her clothing that has already been laundered, and clean her bedroom. You tell her that there should be plenty of time by the end of the day to get all of that done and still have time for her own projects. But at the end of the day the daughter opens the door to the bedroom and "Ta da!" Shows you a newly remodeled bedroom replete with pictures hanging on the wall, a polished floor, and gleaming furniture, but she hasn't done any of the other tasks. While you can admire and appreciate the good work she has done on her bedroom, you might have to teach her time management and the ability to juggle multiple tasks and not get bogged down in one task. If she had been asked to spend the entire day remodeling her room, that would be one thing, but life is filled with economic decisions, and the decision to do *that* project so thoroughly was also a decision to disobey instructions to do three other things. Well, in the same way, you may feel really good about your obedience to the Lord on one or two items in your day and not worry about your outright disobedience on three other items - such as personal devotions and family devotions that Gary and I have been harping on. Faithfulness is pressing more and more into that word "all" - "according to *all* that Moses had commanded Joshua." We can't be perfectionistic if we are going to have that balance. We can't neglect important duties in order to be perfect on one duty. We are never going to be perfect, but we can tackle all the tasks that God has called us to.

God honored Moses with the statement, "He is faithful in all My house." Could God say the same of us? 2 Kings 12:15 praises the treasurers who counted and distributed money to workers because "they dealt faithfully." In 2 Chronicles 19:9 God commanded the pastors to minister "faithfully and with a loyal heart." 2 Chronicles 31:18 praises the little children in the worship service "for in their faithfulness they sanctified themselves in holiness." He is saying that of little children, which means that little children can faithfully attend unto worship - if we will train them to. 2 Chronicles 34:12 praises the craftsmen, carpenters, and builders because "the men did the work faithfully." Would your boss say that you are faithful in your work for him? I found almost one hundred verses calling us to faithfulness - verses that called couples to faithfulness in romance during their period of betrothal (Hos. 2:20), wives to faithfulness in managing their homes (1 Tim. 3:11), homes to have faithfulness in hospitality (2 John 5), faithfulness to our employers (Matt. 25:21), faithfulness in handling our finances (Luke 14:10ff),

faithfulness in our conversations with each other (Prov. 13:17; 14:5; etc), and in our rebukes (Prov. 27:6). The point is, no one is exempt from needing to be faithful. And this verse gives us a tiny snapshot of what faithfulness looks like. We will look at a few more maxims in a bit, but let's move on to our next point.

II. Faithfulness enabled by grace and defined by God's Lordship (v. 11)

How do we achieve this faithfulness? That's the next point. The previous generation of Jews were *not* faithful. They rebelled against God's leaders, disobeyed God's Word, grumbled, lusted, and in many ways showed themselves to be an unfaithful generation. 1 Corinthians 10 highlights that generation as examples of people being judged when taking communion when they are unfaithful. And Paul says that apart from grace; apart from looking to Jesus, none of us can be faithful.

Well, that is symbolized by the ark of the covenant in verse 11.

Then it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over, that the ark of the LORD and the priests crossed over in the presence of the people.

Symbolically it was the ark that protected them and empowered them. The God who was enthroned on that ark stopped the waters from coming one inch closer. The priests were His representatives. And the ark itself pointed to Jesus - both His grace and His law. Let me remind you of what that ark symbolized.

Two weeks ago we saw that on the Day of Atonement the high priest would sprinkle the blood of a bull on the ark to atone for his own sins and then sprinkle the blood of a goat on the ark to atone for the people's sins. That blood foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus and His grace. Inside the ark were the two stone tablets on which God had written the ten commandments (Ex. 25:16,21; 40:20; Deut. 10:2-5), a jar of manna (Numb. 17:25), and Aaron's staff (Heb. 9:4). And on the side of the ark was stored the first five books of the Bible (Deut. 31:26).

So it was a beautiful symbol of Christ and His kingdom. The wood represents the humanity of Jesus and the gold that covered the wood represents His deity. The throne represents His sovereign rule. The bowl of manna represents Christ's provision for us and the closeness of fellowship we can have with God through Jesus (and Revelation 2:17 draws that imagery out beautifully). The ten commandments represent the holiness of Christ's kingdom and the law of His kingdom. There is no kingdom without law. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." (Matt. 5:17). So even though the ten commandments on Mt. Sinai brought fear and condemnation, when the same law was placed *inside* the ark and *under* the sprinkling of the blood, it shows the Gospel. The Gospel is not anti-law. It is the good news that through Christ's blood we are at peace with the law and can live out the law. The rod represents Christ's leadership. So enough by way of review.

But I remind you of all that to show that the ark symbolized the entirety of Christ's provisions as what enabled them to be faithful. Without God's great faithfulness, we could not be faithful.

Philippians 2:11-12 says that we can only work out what God has already worked in. A couple weeks ago we saw how faithfulness flows from faith in Jesus. We grow from faith to faith; from strength to strength, and from glory to glory. To quote William Booth again:

Faith and works should travel side by side, step answering to step, like the legs of men walking. First faith, and then works; and then faith again, and then works again – until they can scarcely distinguish which is the one and which is the other.

Attempting to be faithful without receiving God's grace is ministry in the flesh; its wood, hay, and stubble. You don't just get *justified* by faith. Habbakkuk says that an already-justified person must continue to *live* by faith. Here's how Paul worded it in Galatians 3:1-9.

Gal. 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? 2 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? 4 Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?[And then he goes on to show that Abraham was not only justified by faith; he also lived by faith. He concludes] 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

It's important to distinguish faith from faithfulness, but you cannot separate them. Faithfulness flows from grace, and we receive grace in our Christian walk by faith. Last week we saw that every single time the ark moved, the people were to say Numbers 10:35 - "Rise up, O LORD! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You." In other words, even though they were to be faithful in warfare (that's where they were going), the ark reminded them that they could not succeed in battle unless God fought on their behalf. So the ark was the reminder that faithfulness flows from grace.

III. Faithfulness that didn't sacrifice the family (vv. 12-13)

But the next point deals with an imbalance people sometimes have when trying to be faithful. In being faithful at work, they sacrifice their family. Or in being faithful in the prolife ministry or some other ministry, they fail to do what needs to be done at home. And they lose their kids. I saw this so vividly in one Asian country. The people felt guilty if they were together with their wives and children more than once in six weeks. They said, "After all, Jesus called us to forsake our husbands and children in Mark 10." But that is a misinterpretation of Mark 10. Yes, Jesus calls us to leave house, brothers, sisters, father, mother, wife, and children. But He says that when we leave them to Him (we give them to Him) God gives back the same people and things that we have left 100-fold - husbands, wives, houses, etc. He isn't promising a hundred husbands, but is promising that when we put God first, God will allow us to enjoy our husbands, wives, children, and houses 100 times more. But once we have given a wife to God, how does God want us to treat His property? He commands us to nourish, protect, spend time with, and please the wife. So people are not to be so devoted to one form of service to the Lord that they

neglect serving God in their families. And that is the same lesson given in verses 12-13. Let me read those two verses first, and then explain:

12 And the men of Reuben, the men of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh crossed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses had spoken to them. 13 About forty thousand prepared for war crossed over before the LORD for battle, to the plains of Jericho.

In Numbers 32, God allowed these two and a half tribes to settle in the land on the East side of the Jordan river. God told them that they could build sheepfolds for the flocks and cities to protect the wives and children - and they did so. But He insisted that the men needed to join the rest of Israel in the conquest of the rest of the land. But if you compare numbers, it is crystal clear from the census figures in Numbers 26 that these 40,000 men are only 29% of the 136,930 fighting men in those two and a half tribes. So what is going on? Verses 10 and 12 both say that those tribes were keeping the commandments given by God through Moses. They weren't disobeying Moses. Yet Moses made it clear that *all of them* were to fight. Where are the others? What's going on?

And it is my belief that the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh took shifts, where two thirds of the men would stay behind and a third would cross the Jordan to fight. The ones who stayed behind needed to stay behind in order to protect the women, children, and flocks from attack in their cities. This was not disobedience. This was faithfulness. Keep in mind that the women and children of the other tribes who had not yet inherited the land would follow the armies and be protected by those armies until such time as they could inherit their own land. This meant that the husbands and fathers of the other tribes were usually around to care for their families and fulfill their family duties. In fact, I believe that a certain percentage of the men always stayed as a rearguard for the families. The point is that faithfulness to ministry does not sacrifice one's family.

But there are other lessons in these verses that also relate to faithfulness. Verse 13 says that they were "prepared for war." Luke 14 says that you shouldn't go to war unless you are prepared. You shouldn't build a tower unless you have the means to finish it. In other words, God expects us to engage in due diligence in our callings. It's a maxim of faithfulness. These soldiers took the time to think through logistics, supplies, weapons, armor, training, communications, and all the other things that are needed in order to be prepared for war. We looked at the character of faith in chapter 3. This reinforces that. Faith in the Lord is not contrary to the use of means. Indeed, faithfulness *requires* a diligent use of means. Too many people pit faith against responsibility. No. These men were prepared.

They were also organized. It says in verse 12 that they "crossed over armed *before* the children of Israel." The soldiers went first to guard the way and the rest followed. Another aspect of organization is that they traveled by tribe, clan, and family. Doing things decently and in order is another maxim of faithfulness. We live in a generation that values spontaneity over planning and order, but faithfulness reverses that. If there was one thing that Kathy's parents modeled to us, it was faithfulness to the nth degree.

Verse 13 also says that these men “crossed over *before the LORD*” - literally “before the face of the Lord.” They went past the priests who were bearing the Ark of the Covenant. In doing so they were passing before God’s throne. They went before the Lord in the sense that they went before His face and consistent with His orders. They were not just fighting for Joshua. They were fighting for the Lord. And we too must do our work before the face of God. Calvin used the Latin expression, *Coram Deo*, that means the same thing. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we must do to the glory of God and with His strength.

Verse 13 also says that they crossed over before the LORD “for battle.” These men had already conquered their own territory, and their wives and children had already been settled in cities. But they knew that the work was not yet done until *all the tribes* had possessed their possessions. In the same way, we must not grow lax simply because we have accumulated our desired possession. There is no retirement for the Christian. Until the church of Jesus Christ inherits the world and until the Great Commission is finished, the church’s work is not done. We must sacrifice for missions; we must sacrifice for the greater cause of the kingdom. Every enemy must be placed under the feet of King Jesus. His crown rights must be exalted over every square inch of land. That’s the typological message of the conquest we are going to be seeing in the book of Joshua. We cannot think our work is done until that has been accomplished. It’s not just about what benefits our family; its about the kingdom at large. Faithfulness to God has a broader vision than just my family.

IV. Faithful leaders are exalted by God; they don’t need to exalt themselves (v. 14)

There is one more lesson on faithfulness in these verses, and it is in verse 14. Faithful leaders are exalted by God; they don’t need to exalt themselves. Verse 14 says,

On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they had feared Moses, all the days of his life.

We already saw in chapter 3, verse 7, that God had promised that this miracle would show the people that He was with Joshua as He had been with Moses. But let’s look at each phrase:

“On that day” shows God’s timing. Faithfulness is content with God’s timing. Joshua had been content to be a servant to Moses (who was himself a servant of the Lord). And Joshua served Moses faithfully for forty years. He was in one sense a servant’s servant and did not receive exaltation. And in God’s sovereign timing that exaltation happened on this day. Those who seek exaltation lose it. Ezekiel 21:26 says, “Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted.” Faithfulness does not need to rush the results. We leave exaltation to God’s timing.

Second, verse 14 says, “the *LORD* exalted Joshua.” It wasn’t Joshua who exalted himself. This was a sovereign doing of the Lord. Faithfulness does not push one’s own agenda, or push one’s own exaltation. Faithfulness focuses on faithfulness and trusts God for the results. So there is timing; there is the Lord’s sovereignty...

Third, Joshua was exalted in the sight of all Israel. They *all* recognized that Joshua was the leader that they needed. It didn't need to be forced on them. Daniel 2 shows the opposite way that the world tries to be great. Nebuchadnezzar tried to force Shadrack, Meshech, and Abednego to bow down and recognize his greatness. That is self-exaltation. That shows insecurity. In Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus said,

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

People eventually recognize who is faithful and who is not.

Fourth, it says that “they feared him, as they had feared Moses.” Other translations say they revered him, revered him, respected him, or magnified him. Honor and fear of rulers is an OK thing. The rulers shouldn't demand that. Their faithfulness will automatically attract such respect just as a magnet does, whereas insisting on respect ends up doing the opposite. Who doesn't respect a leader like William Wallace of Scotland? His very faithfulness made people want to be faithful like him and to follow him. He stirred their blood and motivated them to be faithful. Of course, Scripture *does* command those who desire to be faithful to respect, fear, or honor those who rule over us.

At the prayer breakfast this past Thursday, Jarrod Ridge gave an amazing lesson on how to care for elderly parents. I would like to see that talk more widely distributed. We live in a culture that not only kills our young, but also neglects and fails to honor our aged. Scripture calls us to honor and respect the elderly, parents, husbands, officers in the church, masters, employers, and civil officers. It is part of the picture of faithfulness.

If the man himself is not respectable, we can at least respect the office. Proverbs 24:21 says, “My son, fear the LORD and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise.” Maybe that's a call to de-friend the on Facebook. “My son, fear the LORD and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise.” Fear the Lord *and* the king. It's fascinating that he puts the two together. We live an age of revolutionaries who have no fear of rebelling against authority, but faithfulness makes us look at even authority in light of our walk with God. How we treat authorities reflects on how we are treating God.

Finally, because of Joshua's faithfulness, this elevation was permanent. They feared him “all the days of his life.” As men and women grow in their faithfulness they will grow in obtaining the respect of others. May it be true of each one of us. May we be found faithful by God's grace. Amen.