



Joshua 23:1-11

“Be Careful to Love the Lord”

NKJ Joshua 23:1 Now it came to pass, a long time after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age.

2 And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them: "I am old, advanced in age.

3 "You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you.

4 "See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward.

5 "And the LORD your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

6 "Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left,

7 "and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them,

8 "but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.

9 "For the LORD has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day.

10 "One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.

11 "Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God.

Although we can't see it, there is actually probably about a twenty year interval between the end of Chapter 22 and the beginning of Chapter 23. Joshua is now old, and he realizes that soon the Lord will call him home to his final rest. But like any true shepherd of God's flock Joshua's concern has always been for the continued well-being of God's people.

Now if the attitudes of today were the attitudes of ancient Israel, people would have urged him to retire years ago, *“Joshua go get a house by the dead sea, go and invent the game of golf. You've done enough. You've won the conquest, let other people do the work now.”* But Joshua like Moses and Jacob is zealous for the Lord right up to his death. And he wants to do all he can to prepare the people for the time after he is gone. In that sense he is like Paul who gathered the Ephesian elders together to give them his farewell address and his final instructions:

Acts 20:29 *"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*

30 *"Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.*

31 *"Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*

32 *"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

Paul of course was looking to the dangers that were ahead of the church and giving a formal exhortation and admonition, and praying that the church would be wise enough to heed his words and continue to follow the Lord without going aside to the left or the right despite the fact that he knew that men would arise who would seek to do that.

Joshua is equally concerned, he knows that God has given them the land he has promised, because of God they have won the conquest, they have won all the initial battle, but Joshua knows full well that whether or not the win or lose the occupation of the land depends on their steadfastness, their courage, their obedience, and above all things their love to God.

So he wants to give them clear instructions, not just abstract principles subject to personal interpretation. This definitely isn't simply him saying "Be Good" and then letting everyone determine for themselves what being good looks like. Joshua knows precisely what happens when you get subjective interpretation of Good. ***It seemed good in my eyes to do so and so.*** I mean have you stopped for a moment to consider, that the 9/11 hijackers thought that they were doing something really good. The Nazis thought that they were doing something good. Men's definitions of GOOD can in fact be corrupt or simply thoroughly evil. 90% of the moral evils going on in our own nation today stem from the fact that we have abandoned the absolute and unchanging standard for good and evil given in the word of good and instead arbitrarily determine what is good and what is evil based on our own preferences. By that standard literally anything that we want can be "good."

Joshua, knows full well that God is the one who has determined what Good and Evil behavior really are. So he doesn't leave them to figure out what to do, neither does he give them a standard he has made up himself even though he is very wise. He is wise enough to know that he isn't wiser than God. The standard for right and wrong and the standard for their obedience is in verse 6:

6 *"Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left,*

Doing that will not be easy, it will be difficult, it requires COURAGE. Think about that, for a second it requires COURAGE to obey God.

1) LYING [application to kids – telling the truth when it will result in punishment is BRAVE, lying to escape it is COWARDLY]

2) DYING TO SELF, RESISTING TEMPTATION – It is always *easier* in one sense to simply give in to temptation to give up the struggle. The harvest will be very bitter in the end, but it doesn't take much effort to grow a crop of weeds.

3) GOING ALONG WITH THE CROWD is also always much easier

That Joshua knows will be their great struggle, they live smack dab in the midst of a pagan people who worship false Gods, there are in a sense many “evangelists” for the Canaanite way of life all around them and he knows that the more they assimilate into the surrounding culture, the more irresistible the temptation to adopt their practices and their idols will become. Even though they live in the midst of pagan cultures, they will have to remain separate. That is why the Lord was so zealous for them to drive the Canaanites out to leave none of them in the Land that he was giving them, because he knew that they and their Gods would be a snare or a trap to them.

The primary way this will happen is via intermarriage. The Canaanite women are not all hideously ugly, neither are there no single Canaanite men who are not rich and handsome. You remember in the what happens in the story of Samson in Judges 14, Samson sees a daughter of the Philistines who “pleases him well” and insists over the objections of his parents that they get her for him for a wife. Well you can multiply that experience thousands of times over. And each time it happened, the people of the Lord moved themselves further away from the Lord and his commandments. Today, I see the same thing happening with distressing frequency in the Christian community.

A Christian woman sees a pagan man who “pleases her well” and then she invents all these justifications for why he is the only option for her, including how she will convert him. Yes, she says, I will take the forbidden thing and then God will bless my disobedient decision and bring Him to faith and our family won’t have any problems. In the end she almost uniformly ends up piercing herself with many sorrows.

So Joshua says, don’t conform, don’t become like them. If you obey the Lord, then none of them will be able to stand against you.

'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts.

But the hinge to all this is in verse 11 ***"Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God.***

IF you do not love the Lord, if he is not now #1 in your heart, then none of this will be possible, you will not have the desire nor the ability to obey the Lord you God.

As Calvin put it: ***“At length he again exhorts them, as they value their life and safety, to be careful in maintaining love to God. From this source all true obedience springs; for if we do not cling to him with free and ardent affection, we shall study in vain to frame our lives in accordance with the external form of the Law.” - CALVIN***

That is why Moses commanded them: ***“Deut. 6:5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”***

And that brings us to a final application for the Christian ***obeying the will of the Lord is not optional***, this doesn’t mean making up rules for yourself to obey. It means following his commands as they are set forth in His word. But know this, unless you love the Lord your God, yourself, then it will be impossible to obey Him. No man in his natural unregenerate condition has the ability or the desire to obey God:

*NKJ Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,
2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,
3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.
4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,
5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,
9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.
10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

John 14:15 " If you love Me, keep My commandments.

What does Love to God mean: *“Love means walking in God’s ways, obeying God’s commands, holding fast to God, and serving God with all one’s heart and Soul”*