

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 8:3:2011

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

Readings: Joshua 23:1-24:15

14. OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE

On the 18th April 1951, General Douglas McArthur, having been recalled from Korea by President Truman addressed a joint session of the American Congress for the last time. In that message he said some things that have stayed with the historians down through the years. He said, “ *Old soldiers never die, they just fade away. I now close my military career and just fade away. An old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the sight to see that duty.* ” Then he saluted and said “ **Good bye.** ” Old soldiers never die. Old preachers never die. Now, I’m not talking about any of you and I’m certainly not talking about myself. I’m talking about Victor Maxwell and Jackie Hughes and some of those old boys. Of course, preachers do get old. I heard about an old preacher in his eighties who said, “ *If I had known I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself.* ” When folks start coming up to you and saying, “ *My, you haven’t changed a bit.* ” What they really mean is, “ *I am surprised you are not dead yet.* ”

Some preachers grow old gracefully. Some change their hairstyles. I heard about one preacher growing a little bit older so he decided to start parting his hair from ear to ear

and combing it forward and backward. Someone asked him, “ *How do you like your new hair style ?* ” He said, “ *Oh, I like it pretty good, but folks keep coming up and whispering in my nose.* ” Preachers do get old. Soldiers do get old. But old soldiers never die. That could be the theme of these closing chapters of the book of Joshua. The old soldier of the Lord is getting ready to die. Farewells are often touching moments. The Bible records the last words of Joseph, who requested that his bones be carried to Canaan, and King David who encouraged the people to follow the Lord. Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesian elders is a very moving discourse filled with love and concern. Last words seem to gather up, in a few moments the life of the person who is speaking. *Can you imagine being there for Joshua’s farewell speech ?* He is now past ninety years of age and he is reflecting on all that the Lord has done for him. The well known psychoanalyst Eric Fromm wrote in “ *Man for Himself,* ” “ *To die is poignantly bitter but the idea of having to die without having lived is unbearable.* ”

My Joshua the son of Nun had lived. His long life started in Egyptian bondage and ended in a worship service in the Promised Land. In between those events God had used Joshua in defeating the enemy, conquering the land and claiming the promised inheritance. With the great apostle Joshua could sincerely say, “ *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.* ” (2 Tim 4:7) Joshua was about to go “ *the way of all the earth,* ” (23:14) the way you and I must go if the Lord doesn’t return. Can you see this old soldier ? His face is bronzed with exposure, his body is scared with

many battles and his countenance is wrinkled with years of leadership ? Here's an old soldier on the journey home. He is on his way, he's getting ready to die. Now in our study of this book we have seen Joshua from many different angles. We have seen,

1. Joshua the Son:

This is the first role Joshua had in life. Joshua was the firstborn of Nun (1:1 1 Chron 7:27) Thus, on the night of the Passover it was essential that Joshua be protected by the blood of the lamb.

2. Joshua the Slave:

For he was born in Egypt, under the taskmasters whip.

3. Joshua the Servant:

For he is often described as a “ *minister*,” or servant of Moses.

4. Joshua the Spy:

For, he was one of the twelve who were sent out to spy the land of Canaan. (Num 13:8)

5. Joshua the Successor:

It takes time to become prepared for any leadership responsibility and throughout the wilderness journey the Lord was preparing Joshua for his ministry as successor to

Moses. But its not so much 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, that we want to view him for the final time in this series, rather we want to See,

6. Joshua the Soldier:

As he takes leave off the nation and passes the baton of responsibility to others. Now Chapters 23 & 24 contains Joshua's farewell speeches. Some commentators have called it his valedictory. He first speaks to the leaders in Shiloh (18:1) and then he addresses all the people in Shechem. (24:1) Now as we seek to summarize the teaching of these two Chapters I want you to seek that Joshua is looking in three different directions. Notice, Joshua,

(1) LOOKS FORWARD WITH CONCERN

Joshua's greatest concern wasn't himself. His greatest concern was his people and their relationship to the Lord. Joshua, is looking at the children of Israel as they have now settled in the land, saw some things that gave him deep concern. I have a feeling that Joshua observed the people there and was deeply concerned by the growing complacency on the part of the people. *I think as he looked at them again he was also deeply concerned by the increasing compromise with the Canaanite culture all around them.* There is a constant danger that God's people, in the midst of an ungodly world, will accommodate themselves to the patterns and principles of the culture around. That's why the Bible tells us that we must be very, very careful that we never let up. We must

be very careful that we never go along with the temperature of the times. God does not want Christians to be thermometers registering the temperature of the times, but thermostats changing the temperature of the times. So here is Joshua looking forward with a measure of concern. Indeed he presents the leaders of Israel with two scenarios. *Obey the Lord and He will bless you and keep you in the land, disobey the Lord and He will judge you and remove you from the land.* Did you notice that little phrase in (23:12) ? “ *Else if ye do in anywise go back.* ” Joshua does not want them to go back, so he speaks here about,

(a) **THE PREVENTION FROM BACKSLIDING:**

How could it be prevented ? Well, he tells Israel that backsliding can be prevented by,

1. EXALTATION:

Do you see what he says in (23:2-5) ? Joshua reminds the people that from the day they left Egypt, the Lord had fought for them and delivered them from their enemies. He further reminds them that just like the Lord had overcome their past enemies, He would also overcome their future enemies if they would but look to Him in worship. You see, when we praise the true God, we are not likely to praise false gods. When we give due honor to the God of the Bible, we are not likely to forsake Him for false gods. If we stop giving proper honor to God, our respect for God will decline, and we will give honor

elsewhere. Hence, to help Israel avoid apostasy, Joshua begins his counsel by exalting God.

2. CONSECRATION:

It's easy to stay focused when you are fighting, but without the unifying goal, it was possible the country could neglect its relationship with the Lord. Sure, they stayed true to the Lord when they had to depend on Him for battle but now that they were heading into peace and prosperity they might not feel as much a need for God. That's why Joshua directed their minds to the Word of God: Here he repeats the sentiments which had been his guiding light. “ *Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left.* ” (23:6) Joshua message is simple, adhere to the Word of God if you want to survive. My can you not testify to that fact ? I mean its impossible to have victory in the Christina life apart from the Word of God. Is the Word central in your life ? Joshua also directed their minds to the Worship of God: for he said, “ *cleave unto the Lord your God.* ” (23:8)

“ *Cleave,* ” means to be firmly attached to something such as being glued to something. It's the same word that's used in the book of Genesis when it says that husband and wife are to cleave one to another. It's total commitment to the Lord. It is the kind that is needed to prevent personal apostasy. Be glued to the Lord. Be totally committed to the Lord. Half hearted, partial, or incomplete consecration

will never do. My do you feel you are drifting spiritually ? Is it because of a lack of consecration ?

3. SEPERATION:

Look if you will at (23:7) They were to consecrate themselves to God and separate themselves from the world. Joshua says they were not to Walk with the Canaanites: “ *Come not among these nations, these that remain among you.* ” (23:7) My “ *The way of sin is downhill, and those who have fellowship with sinners cannot avoid having fellowship with sin.* ” (Henry) They were not to worship with the Canaanites: “ *Neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them.* ” (23: 7) Still again they were not to Wed the Canaanites: He was echoing and repeating the warning given earlier by Moses. Moses said, “ *Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods.* ” (Deut 7:3, 4) Do you remember Solomon ? Marriage, with the heathen lead him into apostasy. (1 Kings 11:1,2) My separation is a Biblical concept but an unpopular truth.

There used to be a time then there was something distinct and different about God’s people. However, a whole new ideology has been developed which tells us that if we want to win the world, we must become like the world. Thus, there is so much world in the church, and church in the world, you can’t tell the two apart. As a result, many

Christians find themselves walking with the world, worshipping like the world and being wed to the world. Vance Havner was right, “ *We live in a day where there is anarchy in politics, apathy in the pulpit, and apostasy in the pew.* ” A mother took a batch of homemade applesauce and a batch of homemade cottage cheese to a church social. As long as she was doing the dipping, everything was fine. The trouble started when she left her little boy in charge. He used the same spoon for both, and it wasn’t long before there was so much applesauce in the cottage cheese, and so much cottage cheese in the applesauce that you couldn’t tell which was which. My the popular cry in most religious circles today is “ *Get with it.* ” God says, “ *Get out it.* ” Gullible Christians everywhere are unaware of Satan’s strategy to squeeze them into the world’s mould. No wonder Paul says, “ *Be not conformed to this world.* ” (Rom 12:2) “ *Don’t let the world around squeeze you into its mould.* ” My are you conforming to the patterns, the practices and the principles of this old world ? Is this the cause of your backsliding ? (a)

(b) THE PUNISHMENT FOR BACKSLIDING:

You see, if the matter of turning from God is not prevented then it will be punished. In fact, Joshua lists four specific punishments for Israel’s disloyalty to God. Do you see them ? There will be,

1. A Loss of Power:

Look if you will at (23:13) Without God's help in driving out the enemy, Israel would not be victorious. They were absolutely dependent upon the power of God. Do you recall Samson ? Although called by God to judge Israel (Jud 13:5) and endued with mighty power to accomplish his work (Jud 13:25) Samson ended up his life in captivity to the Philistines and that captivity cost him his strength. No longer was he the might Samson now he was just like any other man. (Jud 16:27) My do you remember when you were strong for God ? When the glow was in your heart and you were an over-comer ? Have you lost your spiritual strength because of self indulgence ?

2. A Loss of Protection:

With power gone to win battles, Israel would also lose protection from the enemy. The Canaanites around them would harm them. *" They shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes. "* (23:13) Charles Spurgeon the great preacher said, **" God will not allow His children to sin successfully. "** God says you sin and those very sins will be snares to you. They will be scourges to you. Again we are reminded of Samson who after he lost his power because of drifting from God also lost protection from the Philistines. Once his power was gone, the Philistines *" put out his eyes, "* (Judges 16:21) and then put him in prison. Do you see the painful price that backsliding extracts ?

3. A Loss of Possessions:

Three times Joshua speaks of this aspect of the judgment upon apostasy. *" Ye perish from off this good land, "* (23:13 -16) Is this not exactly what happened ? Israel went into cruel captivity to Assyria and Babylon because they had forsaken Jehovah for idols. Captivity was a sure cure for idol worship in the history of Israel. After the Babylonian captivity, the first thing Israel did was to rebuild the temple and re-establish the worship of the one true God in the land. This has never been a problem since. My whenever a nation or individual forsakes the Lord they will ultimately experience that verse that states, *" Be not deceived God is not mocked for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. "* (Gal 6:7) 1, 2, 3,

4. A Loss of Peace:

For look if you will at (23:16) The Israelites will lose peace in every area because of apostasy. My do you see Joshua's concern for these people ? It was not for their military well being, but for their moral and spiritual well being. *Is this not the key to a nation ?* It's a nation's moral fiber that is so essential. It's a nation's spiritual life that is so vital. That's why we are in such a mess in the United Kingdom. That's why we are in the trouble we are in and having the problems we have. That's why we need to turn back to the Lord again. Is this what you need to do ? Many Christians once served the Lord with a passion but the fire has gone out. As a result of their backsliding they have experienced a loss of power, protection, possession and peace in their lives. Many have the mindset that they can go their own way, do their own thing, and be their own person and still enjoy the rich blessings of God. They

expect God to bless them, but they do not expect God to blister them. But my God is a jealous God, He is a just God. If we turn to Him, we will experience His best for our lives. But if we turn from Him, we can expect His chastising hand. Joshua, (1)

(2) LOOKS BACKWARD WITH CONFIDENCE

Now do you notice the geographical setting is changed ? Three geographical points were of vital importance to Israel during their years in the Land of Promise. **Gilgal** was the military headquarters of the invasion: (4:19) **Shiloh** seemed to be the spiritual centre of the people (18:1) and **Shechem** the political gathering place of the nation. Do you recall that it was at Shechem that God said to Abraham “ *Unto thy seed will I give this land, and there builded he an altar unto the Lord.* ” (Gen 12:6-7) Jacob purchased ground from the men of Shechem and he also built an altar there. (Gen 33:18-20) It was to Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, very near to Shechem, that Joshua renewed Israel’s covenant relationship with the Lord. (8:30-35) I mean can you imagine the drama of this hour ? Here is this old soldier Joshua. Here is the man who has faithfully led in conquest of Canaan. He has settled the nation in the land. He has given them the lots of their inheritance. They are now dwelling in the land of Canaan.

And now they are gathering to say farewell to their great leader and listen to his last words of encouragement and admonition. Do you see what Joshua does ? He recalls their history. That’s always important to do. Someone has

said, “ *Those who forget their history are doomed to repeat it.* ” Its very important to review your history. So Joshua recites the history of the nation right from Abraham up to that moment. No less than seventeen times we find God referring to His accomplishments on behalf of the nation. God says, “ *I took,* ” “ *I gave,* ” “ *I plagued,* ” “ *I sent,* ” “ *I did,* ” “ *I brought,* ” “ *I have,* ” “ *I destroyed,* ” “ *I would,* ” and “ *I delivered.* ” Do you see what Joshua is doing ? He is causing them to remember all the Lord has done for them. Isn’t it so easy to forget the Lord and begin thinking that we are responsible for our blessings and success ? Joshua is looking backward and of this he is confident. “ *To God be the glory great things He hath done.* ” Now notice as he looks backward he recognizes Israel’s God as,

(a) **THE GOD OF ELECTION:**

How odd of God to choose the Jews. Odd or not He must certainly did so. Do you recall that God began with one man ? That man was Abraham. And remember Abraham and his family were idolaters when God called him to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go to Canaan. (Gen 11:27-12:9) Was this not an act of God’s grace ? My Abraham did not seek the Lord and discover Him, it was God who sought Abraham. The Lord Jesus reminded His disciples of this fact when He said, “ *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,* ” (Jn 15:16) The Bible says, “ *According as He hath chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.* ” (Eph 1:4) Someone has said, “ ***Try to explain election and you may lose your mind, but try and explain it away***

and you may lose your soul.” Charles Spurgeon said, “*Its a good thing the Lord chose us before we were born because after we were born He certainly wouldn’t have done it.*”

**Before the hills in order stood
Or earth received its frame
He knew me
Blessed be His name**

(b) THE GOD OF REDEMPTION:

God says, “*I brought your fathers out of Egypt,*” (24:6)
God sent Joseph ahead to Egypt to preserve the nation during the famine (Ps 105:16) and then He sent Moses and Aaron to deliver the nation from bondage.
(Ps 105:23) Do you recall that God instructed His people to observe the Passover as an annual reminder of their redemption from Egyptian bondage ? (Ex 12:27) My our God is the God of redemption. Wasn’t it John Newton who had that text before him daily hanging on his study wall. “*Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee.*”
(Deut 24:18) “*Oh joyous hour when God to me*”

(c) THE GOD OF DIRECTION:

God says, “*I brought you into the land of the Amorites,*” (24:8) God brought Israel out that He might bring them in. (Deut 6:23) The Bible says, “*And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, to*

go by day and night.” (Ex 13:21) When they got into the Promised Land as Israel marched behind the Ark of God , the Lord defeated their enemies. My As we look back this over the way the Lord has led us, can we not testify, “*All the way my Saviour leads me*”

(d) THE GOD OF PROVISION:

Do you see what the Lord says in (24:13) ? God gave them their land. Do you see what Joshua is doing ? He’s just tracing the goodness and faithfulness of God. He providentially provided. These people were under the hand of God. Now look he’s an old man now, but where is his perspective ? On himself or God ? On his achievements or on God’s achievements ? Is he looking to steal the glory or give the glory ? Joshua is looking back and he saying with the Psalmist “*Not unto us O Lord, not unto us but unto Thy name give glory.*” (115:1) Isn’t it easy to forget all the Lord has done for us ? As believers our very lives are in His hands. My all that you have, all that you are, all that you do, is because of the Lord and His work in your life. (1) (2) Finally, Joshua,

(3) LOOKS HOMEWARD WITH COMPOSURE

The old warrior is going home. We read in (24:29) “*And it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun died being an hundred and ten years old.*” He’s going home. This is his swan song and so he lays before the nation their responsibility. That responsibility is summed up in one word, service. The word “*serve,*” is used fifteen times in this last section of the book. To serve

means to fear Him, obey Him, and worship Him only. It means to love Him and fix your heart upon Him, obeying Him because you want to and not because you have to. Notice Joshua speaks here about,

(a) THE MOTIVE FOR SERVICE:

Look at (23:14) The challenge to serve God is built on the foundation of what He has already done. In essence Joshua is saying, “ *Since the Lord has done so much for you in the past serve Him. Since he has cared for you, you owe him your life.* ” Is this not the argument that Paul makes in (Rom 12:1) ? “ *I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God a living sacrifice.* ” Surely what we have received from God should constrain us to give our utmost to God. Was it not this very thing that led C.T. Studd to a life of unstinted service for the Lord ? He said, “ *If Jesus Christ be God and died for me then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.* ”

(b) THE METHOD OF SERVICE:

How are we to serve the Lord ? In “ *sincerity and in truth.* ” (24:14) The word “ *sincerity,* ” means “ *honestly,* ” and the word “ *truth,* ” means “ *with integrity.* ” Joshua brings them to the crossroads of decision. He presents them with a choice. They can serve the false gods of the people or they can serve the true God of power. It’s decision time as he cries, “ *Choose you this day whom ye will serve.* ” Francis Schaeffer says that when Joshua uses the word “ *Choose you,* ” he uses a

special word that means a permanent choice, not a one time choice. In other words, you not only need to choose, but you need to keep on choosing every day to serve the Lord. This is what is happening in my life. There was I day I chose the Lord Jesus as my Saviour. I recall a day when I made a mental decision to make Christ Lord over all my life and serve Him whatever way He asked. But those two decisions important as they were do not negate the daily decision that I must make to go right on choosing to follow the Lord. My every day you have hundreds of choices and you must continually choose to serve the Lord. (a) (b)

(c) THE MODEL IN SERVICE:

Joshua is the role model for he says, “ *I don’t care what everybody else does. I’ve made up my mind. As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.* ” (24:15) “ *Joshua whose soldier are you ? God’s. Joshua whose battles do you fight ? Jehovah’s. Joshua, what’s your purpose in fighting ? To glorify God.* ” Notice this was,

1. A Public Declaration:

Joshua made this declaration before all Israel. Joshua was not a secret disciple. My does Joshua’s outspoken avowal make you blush ? Are you ashamed of the Lord Jesus ? Will you not run His colours up to the masthead where every eye may see them ? (Matt 10:32-33)

2. A Proven Declaration:

Joshua's statement was not hypocritical. Sometimes people speak like this but its more to impress than anything else. But not Joshua. The weight of an honest and pure life drove his words home.

3. A Parental Declaration:

How wonderful it was that Joshua could say, "*As for me and my house,*" his family was united behind him. "*They have all chosen to serve the Lord.*"

4. A Persuasive Declaration:

You see, Joshua's stand encouraged the Israelites to take the same stand. After he declared Whom he would serve, the Israelites "*answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods.*" (24:16) All of us influence people. We may not influence a nation like Joshua did, but we influence people around us. If people follow your example, what will they do spiritually ? Where will you lead them ? Are you so living like Joshua that you are an example of godly living ?

(d) THE MONUMENT TO SERVICE:

Look if you will at (24:25-26) Three times the people affirmed their desire to serve the Lord. (24:16, 21, 24) and Joshua took them at their word. So that they wouldn't forget this solemn covenant with Jehovah, Joshua wrote it in the Book of the Law and then set up a large stone as a perpetual witness to their agreement. You could say, that Joshua made them sign on the dotted line. Do you know

something ? There are many who talk big about serving the Lord but when the time comes for words to be put into action they fail the test. They talk about praying, but they are never at the prayer meeting. They talk about giving but they aren't even giving what God requires. They talk about soul-winning but they aren't involved reaching the community. My are you willing to sing the dotted line ? Are you willing to put your words into action ? Did you notice the chapter ends with,

(e) THE MEMORY AFTER SERVICE:

Look if you will at (24:29-31) Isn't that something ? That's why old soldiers never die. That's why people who have been faithful to the Lord never die. Joshua's influence went on beyond his death. Oh, what an influence he had. Joshua kept Israel in the place of God's blessing. You see, one man committed unreservedly to the Lord and His Word can make an enormous difference in the lives of God's people. My will your life leave an impression of godliness, an impact that will linger long after you're gone ?

Is it time to renew your covenant with the Lord ? Is it time for you to answer this question, "*Choose you this day whom ye will serve ?*" (24:15) My don't serve the false gods of this world. Make Christ first in your life. Steve Wagers tells the story of the forty martyrs of Sebaste. In the famed twelfth legion of Rome's imperial army there were forty soldiers who professed their faith in Jesus Christ. One day their captain informed them that Emperor Licinius had sent out an edict commanding all

soldiers to offer a sacrifice to pagan gods. These Christian warriors said, “ *You can have our armor and even our bodies, but our heart’s allegiance belongs to Jesus Christ.* ” Because of their stance they were marched onto a frozen lake in the midwinter of A.D. 320 and stripped of their clothes. At any time they could renounce Christ and be spared from death. Instead, they huddled close together and sang their song of victory,

**Forty martyrs, for Thee, O Christ
To win for Thee the victory
And from Thee the victor’s crown**

That freezing night saw thirty nine men fall to their icy graves. When there was but one man left he stumbled to the shore and renounced Christ. The officer in charge of guarding these men had secretly come to believe in Christ. *He then replaced the man who had broken rank and walked out onto the ice.* He threw off his clothes and confessed his faith in Christ. At sunrise the Roman soldiers found forty men who gave their all for the cause of Christ. That’s what this old soldier Joshua did. He gave His all for the cause of the Lord. **Will you do that ?**