

All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight - Joshua 23. Well we come to the end (tonight and next time) with Joshua's life. It is the last two chapters of the book. It is certainly Joshua's last words.

And let me ask you a question - show of hands: How many of you tonight are sure you're going to heaven? That's most of you. That's good. Okay. No show of hands this time. How many of you are as confident standing before the throne of God when it comes to your works being judged and analyzed as to what you did and how you did it? Are you as confident then as you were a minute ago? Would you raise your hand that quickly now, or would you wonder? Is it the same answer? Because, literally, we need to have some kind of a strategy on how to live our lives in a way that will profit God's kingdom. It's all that matters in the end, isn't it? That old poem that starts with the words, "There is only one life, it'll soon be past; and only what is done for Christ will last" is for real. In the end, that's really all that matters. And it's possible to have a saved soul but have a lost life. You can get through this life and get to heaven and not leave much behind - to live for the temporal to the exclusion of the spiritual, to not keep the first things first. And sometimes we run into folks later in life, and maybe they've gotten sick, and they regret a lot of things that they might have done. "If I'd only" So, do it now. If you'd onlyget it done. Worldly success without any kind of spiritual gain isn't very much gain at all.

And I only mention that because in these last two chapters, you get to meet a man who spent his life, as far as I can tell, serving the LORD with all that he had. When few people would, he would. When few people would stay up, he'd stay up. When few people would go to seek the LORD in His presence, he would go. When everybody went to bed at night, he'd stay up. I mean, this guy was all-in, all the time, for all of his 110 years of life. And so I guess by the time you get to these last two chapters, one of the chapters tonight is speaking to the leadership. He just picks out the guys that he's been ruling with, heads over the tribes and all - those guys with responsibility, that he wants to leave them with some good advice. Next time - to the nation as a whole. I'm not going to be here, by the way, next Wednesday. You'll have a surprise guest. I'm going to Nashville with my wife for our 37th anniversary. So you should applaud her, probably. (Congregation applauds)

Somebody said, "Is it hard to be married 37 years?" I said, "It's been easy for me. I don't know why she complains all the time." (Laughing) But I guess I do know why she complains all the time. But two weeks from now we'll finish.

So, in any event, these last two chapters are his last words to a people that he loved, that he served all of his life, that he spent a good majority of it just wandering in the wilderness. They broke his heart. They didn't do what he wanted to do. They didn't follow his example much nor listen to his counsel. But yet he gets to the end of his life, and he gets to share what's on his heart. And this book, which is twenty-five years long (in terms of time), was a book about occupation. The children of Israel had gone from being nomads to being pioneers. And they weren't living in the desert anymore; they were living in a land that God had promised to them since the days of Abraham. But this gift that God gave them was a process. In fact, when He sent them in, He said, "You're not going to get the land all at once. You're going to have to take a little bit of it here and then take a little bit more tomorrow, here a little, there a little. It's going to take time." And, certainly, spiritual reality is like that for us. You don't grow up overnight. It was Peter who said in his second letter that God has given to us everything by His divine power that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). But then he said, "So add to your faith" (2 Peter 1:5). If you have everything you need, why should you have to add to anything? But that's the way it works. God gives you everything, but it doesn't come all at once. It takes time, and it grows over time. And so this has been twenty-five years of time. And maturity's not instant. It's not like turning on a light switch. There's no magic wand to make you grow up. There's no "Popeye" episode where you eat the spinach, and two minutes later, you're strong and unbeatable. It's slow, growth. Spiritual growth is slow. It's called a walk in the Spirit, and it really is just that, isn't it? And so here they are twenty-five years later, and there's still lots to be done. But the land was theirs. And so that's kind of what Joshua is facing as he knows he's dying. In fact, he's going to die. He knows. He's 110, and he's on his way out.

If you could plan (and not everybody gets to plan) what your last speech might be - if you knew you were going out, this was your last goodbye - what would you write about you? What would matter? What would you put down on the paper? It's kind of an interesting question. What would you write down to folks that you cared about? Because this is his. These are the words from the LORD through him. And Joshua, at the twilight of his life, says things that I hope that we can all say if we are put in that same situation. He's run his course, he's finished the race, he's got

guys to leave behind that got to do the same thing. Every generation needs a new work of God, a fresh work of God. It's one thing, and it's incumbent upon us as God's people to tell our kids what God has done, who God is, that they might know Him. But it's up to them to get to know Him on their own. You can't live vicariously through somebody else's spiritual life. Our testimony should make them thirsty. Their relationship with God should keep them well-fed. So every generation needs this moving of God's Spirit, encouraged, like I said, by our testimony, and then sustained by their first-hand experience with God.

So tonight chapter 23 - Joshua's farewell address, part 1. Next week, he will gather all of the tribes together, along with the leaders, to give them one last word of advice. Verse 1 of chapter 23 says this, "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. 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.' " It had been seventeen and a half years since the children of Israel had been given by the LORD rest from the enemy in the sense that Joshua had quit leading the army, and they had been given the responsibility to finish the conquest of the land by tribe, individually. And so we're twenty-five years along, or, if you will, we're seventeen and a half years along from the last verse of chapter 22. Those years just pass by in silence; we have nothing to measure them by other than the LORD jumps us ahead almost two decades. Seven and a half years to conquer and divide the land; seventeen and a half years that they had been assigned the clean-up work, if you will. And Joshua begins his speech to his leaders by saying, "I'm an old guy." The frontline leadership in Joshua's life had certainly taken a toll on him. We gather he was hard of hearing (from what we read), that he had eyes that were having a hard time seeing. The wear and tear of this journey through life had showed on him.

It's an interesting picture, dying, isn't it? Moses was healthy until the day that he died. He died healthy. For you name-it-and-claim-it people that never want to get sick, he should be your hero. Because he seemed like he was just fine, you know? And it says in Deuteronomy 34 (towards the end there) that "Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished." He was a healthy dead guy. Right? He went into glory just feelin' good. Caleb was 85 when he said (there in Joshua 14 back there), "I feel like a kid. I've got my strength like I've always had. I'm ready for the next battle." And Caleb was an old guy, seemed to have his best years ahead of him - in his 80's. But that wasn't true

of Joshua. He was old, and he was old for a long time already. It had been seventeen years ago the LORD said to him, "You're old." And now he's willing to agree with God. "I'm old." Yes, you are. God does not give us to understand why some people age better than others, why some folks are healthy as horses at 80 and why some others are not. I'll tell you what you can't do - you can't come to the conclusion God favored Moses and Caleb over Joshua, that somehow He liked them more or they were more faithful. It has nothing to do with the reflection of God's love or His goodness. Nobody had the ministry of Elisha when it came to miracles of the Old Testament. I think he could have probably written the book. I mean, he did more things in the power of God's Spirit - miracle working - than most others. Nobody had greater faith, it would seem. And yet by the time you get to 2 Kings 13:14, it says that "Elisha had become sick with the illness of which he would die." And though he could believe God for so many things, when God was done with him, that's pretty much what happened to him. He died. Some people are stricken more than others. I don't know why that is. The flesh is weak. But I would hope you won't insinuate from that that having faith would make life easier for you and for others who suffer. I always remember the story of Isaac. Isaac, in Genesis 27, was 137 years old - which is the exact age that his brother, Ishmael, had died. So I think that he went, "Well, I'm the exact age that my brother died," and he began to feel pretty sick. We read in Genesis 27:1 that "Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see." And you know the story - that he, in that condition, said, "I'm about ready to kick the bucket." He called Esau, his boy, to bless him with the blessings of the firstborn - something that God had chosen not to give to him but to his brother. But he was going to disobey. He was going to bless his favorite son. And though you know the story, I just bring it up because he did so, at least in part, driven by the fact that he thought this was it. Well this wasn't it. In fact, just keep reading. He doesn't die. He's not even on his last legs. He would live another forty-three years and die at the ripe old age of 180. And by then, his wife was long gone. But he was pretty sure at 137, "This is it. Here we go. Come here, Esau. A little blessing before I go."

I know God has purposed your life. I don't know whether I can explain to you how He might use it. I always think about James, there in Acts 12, who was in jail with Peter and got executed; and Peter had this great miracle he got to write about and a story to tell about an angel waking him up and busting him out of prison. You can't walk away from the story saying, "Well, God loved Peter more than James." But He was done with James, and He wasn't done with Peter. And when He was done with Peter, he'd get crucified upside down, and God was finished with Peter. The fact

that some people have a harder road than others is something only God can explain, and here's how He explains Himself, "I'm sovereign." He just goes, "I'm the Boss." He doesn't give you any reasons. His ways are beyond your finding out (Romans 11:33). That's how He explains Himself. "Nana nana na na. I know something you don't know." That's the way it goes with God. So, rather than being consumed with - Why does God allow? - and I always worry when people come to me and go, "Pastor, why do you think the Lord?" because I just say, "I don't know." I don't even wait for the question. I don't know. It is better that you are filled with the idea that God knows best what is good for you. I've done a lot of funerals over the years - sometimes two and three a week for weeks on end. We used to laugh, people die in threes; no, they die in nines when you're in ministry, I think. People that are 100 years old that die. I did a funeral for a baby that was two hours old (when the baby died). I have found that most of the real dedicated saints of God are those who seem to have suffered the most. I had Joni Eareckson (Tada) out at church for years when she was local - to come and share her testimony. I never failed to be impressed by her commitment to the Lord. Corrie Ten Boom used to come out to Costa Mesa and shared what she went through in the prison camps and all. The model of God's heart, these people - they suffered so much. So don't be thinking that someone with chronic illness or difficulty in life is indicative of anything other than God loves them, and He has a different plan for them.

But you see that in Joshua. He's not the oldest guy around. He's had a pretty rough life for the last couple of decades. He hasn't been running any marathons. He's just barely gettin' by. The LORD had said to him early on, "You're old." And now, "I'm old." Yeah, he was even older now, but the LORD had used him greatly. And now he says this to his spiritual leadership - from all kinds of responsibilities. And in these two chapters (I should say) he quotes from the book of Deuteronomy more than a dozen times, which interests me that this old guy was a man who loved the Word of God, and he hung his hat on it a lot. And so, as he begins to speak to the people, that's what he wants them to know - God's Word - and especially the leadership.

He says, in verse 3, to them (after saying, "I'm old"), " '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. 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.' " So whenever you read "nations," especially in the Old Testament, if you're not talking world powers

like the Babylonians or the Assyrians, most of the time the word "nations" refers to city states. By that I mean one large city, or even not-so-large, with a wall around it, a king, some army guys who are defending their territory. And that's pretty much it. And some of them had more than one city. But in Canaan, a lot of these were small. Israel today is small. It's far smaller than New Jersey. It's almost the size of Connecticut. Well these little nations were nothing at all like that. They were just cities with a wall and a king and an army. Some of them had multiple cities, but the LORD had given them victory. The enemy wasn't yet subdued. It's been twenty-five years. You might say, "Gosh, why didn't they get to it?" Maybe they had tried. Don't know. We do know that the next generation, though, didn't learn from the previous one (that they continue in God's strength), which is why the book of Judges becomes kind of a disappointing book but one that has a lot of lessons in it. They needed to finish the work God had begun. They hadn't. He'd been faithful. Notice what he says, "God has given it to you, God has fought with you, God has divided the land for you. He's given it all to you from the Jordan all the way over to the Mediterranean. So, be faithful now as He's been faithful." That's his word to his leadership. "Do what God has promised to do."

Verse 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. 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.' " So, "God has fought for you, He's given you land from the River to the Sea. He's given you victory. You've all been given a responsibility to excise the enemy from the land that you've been given. God has begun a good work. God will finish the work. Be sure that you go where He goes. Depend upon Him."

And then he begins in verse 6, down through about verse 10 or so, to say to them, "And separate yourselves from those that are in the land." Notice verse 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, but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.' " So, they were still doing well. " '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. One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.' " Now remember, it had all been good while Joshua was leading, it had all been good for the last two (almost) decades while the nations themselves were taking on that

walk with God. But his parting words to them are, "Don't even take the name of their gods on your lips. Don't swear by them, don't bow to them, don't serve them. Hold fast to the LORD. He's made you stand. He's going to make you stand. You've got a work to do. It's not done, but if you'll be faithful, one of you can put a thousand of your enemies to flight. That's how strong God has made you."

I love verse 6. He said, "So keep and do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses." Not just keep it, but do it. Don't just memorize it. Don't just quote it. Don't just read it. Don't re-read it. Go do it. When Joshua was a younger man (he was 85), at the beginning of the book of Joshua, the LORD (in chapter 1) had come to him and said, "Look, you're going to be prosperous in the work that you're going to do if you will keep and do all that's written in this book." And the very same words that the LORD had spoken to him when he set out, he remembers on his death bed. "This is what God said I should do. God has honored it and been faithful to it." Now he hands it off to these guys.

I want you to notice (in verse 6) the words "the Book of the Law of Moses" because, by this time, they have been twenty-five years in the land - the Land of Promise. The people had gone in, they had possessed great portions of it, they had lots left to do. The LORD, through Joshua, would tell us that (at least at this point) they were doing well. They were moving forward. There was a genuine faith in terms of the people trying to obey what the LORD had set before them to do. Eventually they would not do that, this next generation. But notice that twenty-five years in, they had a codified word from the LORD, a written word from the LORD, regarding, "This is the standard by which we live." Or, if you will, they had a Bible already, and the Bible was the Word of God through the work and through the life, and then through the words and the penmanship, the authorship of Moses. And they held it in great esteem, and it was the Word of the LORD. So, when they settled the land, the children of Israel already had a canon of Scripture. We wonder sometimes - Where does the Bible come from, and how do we believe in it, and how do we know it's the right one? Well, you can start here. God had given them a canon, and they believed it had been sent from the LORD. They believed that it was God-breathed. They hung on to it with conviction that following it would bring God's blessing. They had a history that said it would. It did. God would do what He had said. Constantly you read that. They didn't have the book of Psalms in it yet. David hadn't been born to write it. They didn't have the book of Revelation yet. But they had the beginning of the canon of Scripture, and as they were to proceed, they were to determine as they went whether the things that

they believed in and trusted in were words that had come from the LORD. So here's the basis for the Bible's birth, if you will, and the Law of Moses was their Bible, and the Word of God was something they believed in.

Today we have sixty-six books in our Bible - thirty-nine of them are the Old Testament, twenty-seven are the New. If you go to the book of Isaiah, they have sixty-six chapters - the first thirty-nine of them speak about the coming of the Lord the first time, the last twenty-seven chapters about the coming of the Lord the second time. It's almost the first and the second, if you will.....if you were raised Catholic (like I was), we had in our Bibles fourteen other books. They were called the apocryphal books, if you will. If you were a Seventh Day Adventist, you had the Bible and said, "This is the inspired Word of God," and next to it you had the writings of Ellen G. White and you said, "These are inspired as well." The Christian Scientists have a Bible, and they believe in it; and then they have the writings of Mary Baker Eddy and her works in health and science, which they say is on equal footing with the Bible. Christian Science is like grape nuts - there're no grapes in grape nuts, there're no nuts in grape nuts, there's no Christian or science in their doctrine. It's just a bunch of flakes in a box. (Laughing) But it is what they have convinced people to believe in. If you are a Mormon, the Bible is the Word of God, but so is the revelation of the angel Moroni. So the angel Moroni went to Joseph, there in Cumorah Hill in upstate New York, and passed along the Book of Mormon, and that's the Bible to them as well. And then they added their doctrines and covenant books, and, "This is the inspired Word of God to the Americas." But it isn't canonical, certainly. So what is the true canon of Scriptures? What books are biblical? How should we believe them to be? And which ones do we trust in? And what are the criteria which we follow? But you can begin here. Here's the Word of God - proven, verified, spoken, delivered. And God stands behind it. If you are a Catholic (like I was) with the Apocrypha, the apocryphal books in the Catholic Bible are fourteen books, all Old Testament in nature. They find themselves in the Old Testament. So there're no New Testament ones. They're Tobit and Esdras and Maccabees and all. They're very poorly-written history. In fact, they don't even stand up very well to historical scrutiny. But they were already in print by the time of Jesus, and they had been refuted by the Jewish scholars who had been handed the responsibility of keeping the Word of God and delivering it, the nation that He had chosen. So, you never find Jesus quoting out of one of them. You don't ever find a book in your Bible cross-referencing one, and yet you take those apocryphal books out, and a lot of

Catholic doctrine disappears. Purgatory comes and goes, and some of the other things that Catholics tend to cleave to are found only in the apocryphal books.

The criteria that were used early on by the Jews was pretty interesting because they wanted to answer four questions. Number one - was it authoritative? The Bible has the words, "Thus saith the LORD" 2,600 times. Well, did He say it? Did it come to pass? Was He telling the truth? Can it be verified? That was one criterion. What was in it? Was it verifiable? Was it authoritative? Second of all - was it prophetic? And by that I mean the person that delivered it, was it a designated prophet or someone recognized as a prophet? Do you know that, in the Bible anyway, the prophets who wrote and spoke were recognized as such in the times in which they spoke. So they were identified; not some guy who comes around in twenty years, "Yeah, it was a prophet." Well, no one knew it then. No, they knew it then. They wanted to be sure that the Word of God was in use. In other words, before we discern something to be canonical, it had to be in use. Were people using it? Paul's letters were in circulation when he wrote them. Peter acknowledged that. And then - were they dynamic? In other words, were they able to touch the condition of the human heart? Did it change the life? Was the hand of God upon those things that we cleave to? And the early church weighed, as did the Old Testament scholars, those things in looking for whether we should include into our Bibles the things that are there. Now, since then there're lots of cross references that are easily used to identify Scriptures. You can study them if you like. There're the quotes of one to another, and the veracity of the fulfilled prophecies that are found therein and all; very helpful.

But here early on, here's a bunch of guys twenty-five years in the land, and Joshua says, "Live the book. Hear the book. Do the book. Don't lose the book. Cleave to the book." And he meant it. Hang on to this.

He says, in verse 7 to them, " '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, but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.' " "Do as you've been doing.' " From verse 5, " 'as the LORD your God promised you' " to verse 6, " 'keep and do' " to verses 7- 8, " 'hold fast to the LORD your God.' " Look, it's not good enough to own a Bible. I'm always amazed that people come in sometimes to the back counter, and they'll say, "Hey, you guys have my Bible?" They'll say, "No. We only have our own Bibles." "No, no, no. I lost my Bible." And you'll say, "Well,

what does it look like?" And they'll go, "It just looks like a Bible." And then you'll say, "Well, when did you lose it?" and they'll go, "Four weeks ago." And I go, "Four weeks ago! And you just noticed it now?! Frightening." And then they'll say stuff like, "Oh, I've been reading my kid's Precious Moments Bible." "Oh, come on." (Laughing) "Seriously? You have not." And then we have this box of Bibles. "Here you go." We've got great looking Bibles. We could probably make a living selling your Bible. But you've got to have more than a Bible. The Bible's got to have you, right? This Bible that you hold in your hand is the Word of God if you hang tight to it, keep it, do it, keep fast to it, follow it. Listen to what God has to say. It's His Word. It's the canon of Scripture. It's something God stands behind. It's not a self-help book. It's not suggestions on how things might go a little better. It's not a life guide for dummies. It's God's promises to His creation. So we have to be conformed to it. We have to embrace it and practice it and know it. I think, if anything, we as a church are committed to gather together to study the Scriptures, and it's encouraging to do and to keep what we have learned. We have to be able to do that. And notice even in the "dos" and the "do nots" here (in just a couple of verses here). "Don't mention their gods or the heathen. Don't take their names in your mouth. But hold fast to the word that the LORD has given to you. To the LORD your God, hang on to Him."

Notice in verse 7 that Joshua says to the leadership, "I don't even want you to speak about the names of their gods. Don't bring them up. Don't take a vow. Don't bow down. Don't compromise." Israel finds itself in a land surrounded by polytheistic cultures who worshipped many gods. When we get to the book of Judges, we can go through some of them because they pop up a lot more there. But every creation had a god - the moon and the stars and the lakes and the oceans and the trees and the logs and the plants. Everybody had a god. And so these folks would worship, literally, everything that they needed from these objects of creation. They would esteem them as gods. They would make images of them. They were polytheistic, not only in terms of believing in a multiplicity of gods but they were unable to separate God from His creation. So when there was a war between two factions, it was a war between the gods - the god of the valley, the god of the mountain, the ocean. Let's see who's going to win. It was always the war of the gods. They couldn't remove them so they made images of them. And the LORD said to Joshua, to the leaders, "Look, just don't get involved making images." The first couple of commandments, right? "No gods before me. No images." Why no images? The answer's pretty simple. Any image you make is going to fall short of who God is. Images are made out of man's imagination. The knowledge of God

comes to you by God's revelation. One's imagination; the other is revelation. You want God to speak to you, and that, no image can maintain. So, "Stay away from them," He says to a monotheistic religion, the Jews, the only people who believed in one God and served Him in that manner.

Now here's the interesting thing to me, and you can run into it today if you talk to Jews that practice their religion faithfully. The LORD said through Joshua, "Don't mention the name of their gods" at all. Eventually Israel, in their history, decided that the name of God (their God) was too holy to even be said on their lips, and they stopped pronouncing it at all. In fact, they never wrote the name of God down. Those four Hebrew letters - YHWH (the tetragrammaton) - nobody knows how to pronounce it because you can put vowels in there any place you like. So that's why the big argument between Yahweh and Jehovah. They're the same consonants with emphasis and vowels in different places. The argument is it should be Yahweh - there aren't any real hard j's, like Jehovah, in Hebrew. But we really don't know how to pronounce it. A Jew today who writes the name of God (and I have Jewish friends who write to me) - when they want to say God, they would just put a G and then a line, like you'll figure it out. "Well I know what you're trying to say there." But they won't say it. Or, in speaking to you, they might say Hashem, which just means "the name." There's really no name there. "Baruch Hashem Adonai." It just means "the name." There's really nothing there to follow. So, ironically, Joshua says to the boys, "Don't mention their false names." Instead, they decided not to mention their own. If I could give you a word of advice, go talk about God a lot. Use His name everywhere you go. And be sure that you're identified with His name.

Verse 9 says, " '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. One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.' " If you go back to chapter 1:5 of Joshua, the LORD said the exact same thing to him as Joshua now repeats (in verse 9) to his men. So at the end of Joshua's life, he was able to say, "God's been faithful. This is what He told me, and this is what He's done," and he tells the leaders that he's leaving behind. In essence, the battles that the children of Israel now needed to fight (with Joshua out of the way) were considerably less than when they got there. All of the thirty-one kings that you read about in the chapters that came up to this, the tough guys, were gone. There was considerably less opposition, but the keys to victory had remained the same. "Do it with the LORD. Do it with Him. Hang on to

Him. He'll put a thousand to flight. Just obey Him." Martin Luther - one of his famous quotes was, "With God, one is the majority." And no one knew that better than Joshua, and he wanted these guys to know it as well.

Well then he said to them, in verse 11, " 'Therefore' " (or because of that) " 'take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God. Or else,' " (and I don't like the "or else" - things are going so well, and then "or else") " 'if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations - these that remain among you - and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you, know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.' " Now those are pretty heavy words. I mean, you can't argue with an old, dying guy. Maybe that crooked little finger is doing like this (Pastor Jack points his finger at the congregation and shakes it). I don't know. But these are pretty heavy-duty words to deliver. In verse 11, everything's so good. "Just listen to the LORD, love God, or else. Love God or else. Don't go in to them. Don't be a part of them." I tell you - the hard thing for the church, I think, to learn in any generation is that the world is a great place for evangelism and outreach. It is no place for you to find fellowship. It's not a place you're supposed to go to find friends and business acquaintances and get hooked in to the world. The world is for ministry, for outreach. The church is for fellowship and friendship. But there, we're called to be witnesses. And notice (in verse 11) that they're called just to love God. Right? Don't get yourself involved with the gods of the world, whatever they are - success, income, power, whatever money can buy. But "love the Lord. Keep Him first. Separate yourself from the nations that are among you, which you're now placed among, those nations that are still around you, that 'remain among you,' " (verse 12), and instead, you just "love the LORD. Be careful. Take care of yourself. Love the LORD. Don't cling to, don't get involved with, don't tie yourself to these worldly gods who will take you out, will become a constant source of irritation." That was his word to them.

Look, ask yourself this question. How many people have you shared the gospel with this year? Half a year is gone, almost. Half the year's gone, almost. Can you imagine? Wasn't it just Christmas, like two weeks ago? By the way, we had our (I don't know if I told you) missionaries in England send me a note two weeks ago. And it was a picture - remember those postcards we put out for you to be able to mail to the missionaries? The addresses were on them, and then you just filled out

whatever you wanted. Well, we had several that went out their way. But she got one in the mail that was addressed to her and her husband - the Saunders' - they got it May 17th. And it was mailed December 12th. It had the right stamps on it and everything. It just got lost in the mail. But she said, "I can't begin to tell you how blessed we were to get this Christmas card on this day," and then she began to share some of the things they'd been going through, and she said, "This was a word from the Lord for us." There was a young 13-year-old boy from our church that had sent it to her, and he had written, "You guys are such an inspiration to me, and I hope when I grow up I'll be just like you." It just so blessed their life. They said, "Tell this little boy how much God used him just by sending the letter late." It just showed up late. But what fruit there was, right? I mean, what fruit there was!

So, if you had to ask yourself - after six months - how many people have you shared the gospel with this year? Or how many people have you prayed with to receive Christ? And maybe that's a small number. But why is it a small number? And how many folks have you actually brought to church with you this year? I don't mean picked on a guy at work, "You should go to church, you loser!" No, I don't mean like that. (Laughing) I mean really prayed. Because, ultimately.....how many people are you discipling? How many folks call you up and say, "Hey, would you help me to understand this Bible? Would you teach me what it means to pray? Can you help me?" How many folks are you directly responsible for in their spiritual well-being? And ultimately that's the scorecard that matters, isn't it? It really is the thing that matters. This other stuff doesn't matter. I don't care how much money you made this year. You're going to leave that all here. Or you're going to spend it all, and then you're still going to leave it all here. But how many people are going to heaven because of you, your walk with God? How many people's lives are being changed because of you? What are you doing with your time?

And Joshua said, "Don't get hooked up with the world, man, and its gods. Love the LORD. Have a spiritual gain, a spiritual stat sheet." I realize it's the Lord who works in you and through you, but you still have to be willing to go. And notice (from verse 11), that your first duty is not to serve God but to still love Him. To know Him is to love Him. And it seems to me God is easy to love. The fact that He loves me is incentive enough for me to love Him more. The fact that He loves you, I can't even begin to believe. (Laughing) No. I do. Love God first. That'll keep all of the fires burning. Right? Love Him first. "Or else." I hate that verse. That doesn't sound good.

So far it has been so encouraging, but there's another side to the agreement made by God under the Mosaic Law, and that is that there were consequences of disobeying or hooking yourself to the world or getting yourself involved in the place where God has planted you. And the bottom line (in verse 13) is you never get out from under it. It's very picturesque language - that the world and your involvement with it and your ways away from God will become snares and traps and scourges and thorns, and you'll perish. It'll kill ya in the land. You'll be in the land. It'll kill ya! In the land. You can die in church, die in fellowship. There is a principle about separation. You know, you and I live in the world. We breathe the world's air, and we drink the world's water. But we're not of the world. Right? The whole monastic movement of the 60's by the church and in certain circles was the desire to separate from the world. "Let's go live in a monastery up in the mountains." And the flaw with monastic movements is it fails to recognize that the greatest sin is in your heart. I've had people sometimes (because of California being so liberal) say, "We're going to take our kids to Idaho. What do you think?" and I go, "Well it'd be great if you didn't have to go," and they'll maybe give me a dirty look. But it's true. The greatest sin is within us. So, "Hey, we're going to Hawaii." "Yeah, and your sin will go with you!" You can't run and hide. It's you that God wants to deal with to separate ourselves. So we need to be separated from the sin that grips the heart. We have to be integrated into the world, and reach out to them without them touching us. Isn't that interesting? When Jesus wrote those seven postcards to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, one of them He wrote to Pergamos. The literal translation for Pergamos is "mixed marriage," the marriage between the church or the saints and the world. And the Lord warned them there in chapter 2:13. He said, "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith," and you've got to hang in there "where Satan dwells." You work. He says it twice. "You're in the world, man, but you're not of the world." And Joshua gives that advice to these folks as well. Love the Lord. By that I mean separate yourself from the world around you. Don't let it get in because the minute it gets in, if you have intimacy with the world, you lose God's delivering power from your life. Right? Worldly associations steal from you the things that you need to make it through this world. You go there, you lose your strength. "Snares and traps and scourges and thorns in your eyes until you perish." Those are pretty powerful words, and they are all introduced by the words, "Just love the LORD or else....." This is old man Joshua telling the next generation. "Listen up, man. Go right. Fly right."

And then he says to them in verse 14, " 'Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed.' " Joshua knew his day was up. Paul knew his day was up. So did Peter. Isaac was off by a few years - forty-three to be exact. But all of us are going to go the way of the earth. In other words, we're going to die. It's the way of the earth. The statistics are impressive - 100% of everyone born dies. 2011, by the way, which is the last year that the World Health Organization has stats for (when it comes to dying in the world) tells us that roughly 55½ million people a year die, which figures out to about 2½ people a second die. So in the time it took me to tell you that, 20 people died around the globe. You're not going to be able to avoid it unless the Lord comes back for the church, which is our hope, right? We want the rapture so we can all get on the same bus. We like that. Don't want to each go on Uber. We'd like to all just go at once, together. (Laughing) But Joshua had learned one thing (and he knew where he was headed), and that was God could be trusted because He had always said and done everything that He had said. In fact, we spent a whole Wednesday, did we not, in chapter 21:45 where he said the same thing, only it was years earlier. And that was God will always do what God has said. He was encouraged looking backward. He was equally encouraged looking forward. God can deliver by many or by few. "One of you can put a thousand to flight." I always liked the story of Jonathan (and maybe we'll get there one day the way we are going) in 1 Samuel 14, where it talks about Saul was a guy that liked to sit under the tree and eat pomegranates. But his boy wanted to go out and fight the enemy and said to his armorbearer, "Let's go see what the LORD might do with the two of us against a whole army." And his armorbearer said, "That's a cool idea. High five." He had a guy that served with him that had the same kind of heart. But he believed God.

So Joshua ends this portion saying, in verse 15, " 'Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you, so the LORD will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the LORD your God has given you. When you have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you.' " Now you might say, "Gosh, that's a tough way to end the message." But remember, he's meeting with leadership people, and he wants them

to hear it. When you get to the next chapter, he'll still warn the people, but he's a lot more.....he's more blunt here. He will certainly warn them then. He'll call them to decide who they're going to follow, but he's pretty tough here. But here's his argument - God hasn't failed in one thing (verse 14). He's done exactly what He said. Now that's a blessing if you're walking with God, but it should be a warning if you go the other way. He also said if you went the other way, He's going to deal with you. Right? So take Him at His word because disobedience and rebellion also have attached to them a promise from God of judgment. So, he kind of ends his word to the leadership like Moses does in Deuteronomy 28 - with a warning. God is good, God is faithful, God has done some great things, He's going to do more things. But be careful that you put Him first.

So you only have one assignment - just to read one more chapter. Can you do that? And see what the Lord would speak to you about before we go through it together. And then we're going to lose Joshua, and we're going to lose Eleazar, and we're going to rebury Joseph again, all in thirty-three verses. And then we're going to go after this next generation.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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