

The Book of Jesus | Crossing Into the Land of Promise

Joshua's Last Stand (II)

Joshua 24.12-28

10.28.18

'Then I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, but not by your sword or your bow. ¹³ 'I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.'

¹⁴ "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

¹⁶ The people answered and said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; ¹⁷ for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. ¹⁸ "The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God."

¹⁹ Then Joshua said to the people, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. ²⁰ "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you." ²¹ The people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD." ²² Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses." ²³ "Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." ²⁴ The people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice." ²⁵ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. ²⁶ And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. ²⁷ Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, so that you do not deny your God." ²⁸ Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his inheritance.

As you see by the title of today's sermon, we've come to the end of this book that we've unpacked over the last eight weeks. This is the second part of Joshua's farewell address.

Joshua took the baton from Moses; he led the Israelites into the Land of Promise that God gave them and now old Joshua is preparing to die. He's passing the baton to the people and leaving

the scene with some urgent words for this first generation of Israelites who will live in the Promised Land and represent YHWH (the God of the Bible) to the nations who don't know Him.

Today's passage has a lot to do with a couple of concepts that are on the minds of modern South Floridians... modern Americans or Westerners in general... The buzzwords words aren't found in the ancient Hebrew or even the English translations but the concepts or ideas of Self-Esteem (Self-Image) and Identity are pretty central in this farewell speech.

Self-Esteem and Identity: how we think of ourselves and how we might choose to identify ourselves to others. If someone asked YOU to describe yourself in a few phrases, what would you say? Would you use a job-title... a marital status... gender...ethnicity or tastes in music... age... interests... WHO ARE YOU?

How people think of themselves (self-image) is somehow related to how we think of God. John Calvin made that point at the start of his revolutionary work, *The Institutes* – our God-concept and our self-concept are bound together. That's what we're thinking about today – let's look at: 1) Something That BUGS Me About This Text 2) A Suggested Resolution 3) How to Really Serve God (i.e. the truth about commitment).

This second part of the farewell speech begins with a long rehearsal of God's deeds on behalf of the people of Abraham. God repeatedly ACTS for them.

About 15 significant people and places are included in this survey and all to make ONE significant point. I'll look at the first and last of these references.

The first is the ancestral father of the Israelites – Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor. (v.2) "From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, and they served other gods. 'Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River..."

The point is: Abraham (as I mentioned last week) was not looking for God... he was from a family of God-avoiders – idol worshipers! But God went looking for Abraham and God took Abraham and planted him in the Land and then promised to give that Land to Abraham's descendants.

Then all these other names and places are added to make the same point and finally, the last of these historic references (in today's first verse – v. 12), "Then I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, but not by your sword or your bow."

Every historic reference combines to make the same point – "It was NEVER your good looks or your hard work or moral superiority or progressive spirituality or military strength that got My attention (says the LORD) ... I never responded to YOU... I always initiated WITH you."

At least 15 significant examples of YHWH (the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) who chose this people NOT because they were good or deserving but because He wanted to show His truth, beauty and goodness TO them and THROUGH them. As we said last week – this is the One God who relates to human beings on the basis of GRACE not karma.

And THEN... after demonstrating that THIS has always been the way God deals with us...to this very day; it's always been God's grace and His undeserved favor toward us NOT our earnestness or any qualifications we met... AND THEN...Joshua says, (v.14) "Now, THEREFORE, fear YHWH...serve Him in sincerity and truth...put away these gods (idols) you served in Babylon and Egypt and serve YHWH...Choose ye this day YHWH or idols..."

And the people gasp! "Far be it from US... that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods..."

And that seems to be the fitting answer... they even recount that "YES! YHWH drove out the peoples before us and we will serve YHWH – He is our God!"

But (and THIS is the thing that BUGS me...and I hope it bugs YOU!) Joshua doesn't say what he ought to! Joshua is a bad motivator! He should affirm them and put some PEP in this pep rally...but he's a "Debbie-downer" – he's dark and discouraging!

They say, "We WILL serve the LORD" and their not-so-positive leader responds, "You won't be able to serve the LORD."

What kind of response is THAT?

We know they don't have a great track record... but then again...this IS the new generation and surely they've learned a thing or two and maybe this is the time for "Go-Team-Go! We can serve God – lets' go!"

And my question is, "Why the negativity at this point and what does he hope to accomplish?"

Well, evidently, he recognizes some tragic flaw in this people and their response... They apparently have an inaccurate self-concept and Joshua is going to help them with it but he begins with their God-concept... (v.19) "Then Joshua said to the people, 'You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins.'"

This God, YHWH, is not like the gods of Egypt or the gods of the Canaanites – He is unique (one of a kind) and He is jealous (meaning He will not share you with abusers – and ALL the idols are abusers).

Idols are tools you THINK you can use to control the forces of nature – the weather gods (like Baal) and fertility gods and gods of the seas and gods of the mountains – and you CONTROL them by giving them fruit... And when that doesn't work, you give them animals and when that doesn't work you give them your own children... BUT IT'S ALL AN ILLUSION that makes you feel like YOU are in control.

"I, on the other hand, (says the Lord) can't BE controlled. I am the ONLY God who acts in history and is NOT dependent on worshipers to feed Me and move Me – remember? I've been feeding YOU... I've been fighting for YOU... I chose YOU. I am HOLY, i.e. not like the fake gods, the statues that are really only PROJECTIONS of your own selves."

"And I am married to YOU. I've committed to you and I love you and I will not sit by and watch you be victimized by idols made by people."

I am the only true and living God – Unique. I relate to you (as I have from when I called Abraham the idol-worshiper) I relate to YOU by grace... but you keep turning it into a transaction..."

And Joshua sees what they can't see in themselves. They seem to be saying, (v. 18) "OK – YHWH saved us from the people so we'll return the favor and we'll serve Him... 'cause... we know how it works in this life – YOU ONLY GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR... and this God, YHWH, saved us, defended us, drove out the people from our Land SO – it's time that we pay up... He helped US...now it's our turn to help Him.... WE WILL SERVE THE LORD!"

And IF that IS their platform – no wonder Joshua's not so excited! And no wonder he's saying, "As long as you relate to the Sovereign God of Grace on the basis of transactional deals and karma and as long as you see Him as basically the same (more powerful but basically the same) as the idols – He will NOT forgive you as a transaction – He's NOT that way."

"He is HOLY....He's ONE of a kind. You can't give Him the place of honor on your "shelf of gods". You have to get rid of the shelf altogether and recognize that He is completely different...He's Holy and He won't share you with abusive imposters."

And tied to this understanding of God, is their understanding of themselves. They are the Bride of YHWH – they belong to Him (their core identity). They are His cherished people, the object of His affection. He loves them with an everlasting love (Jer 31.3) NOT based on their deserving but on His Sovereign Love. That's who they are.

AND they are wired to worship. They have to worship (WE have to worship). It's why Joshua never said, "Well worship YHWH...or the idols...or worship nothing" – No! The third option is NO option. The people WILL worship! All people will worship. Even atheists have something they trust supremely, something they value supremely – all people worship (Dylan was right – "But you're gonna have to serve somebody"... - we're wired to worship.)

But the other thing these people (and we too) don't see in themselves is their absolute contempt for and antipathy toward grace. Because we are fallen and because we are sinful and want only to be in control, we don't want grace.

Grace is NOT something we can control. It is God's initiative – we can't buy or sell it. We can't qualify for it. We can't go up to heaven and bring it down or muster it up (Rom 10.6-7). And yet, when grace finds us out...and when the Spirit of God applies grace to us...and inspires FAITH in us to receive this grace – it begins to change us...

And little by little we lose the illusion that WE are in control and we begin to revel that the God of Truth and Grace – the Unique God of Sovereign Grace – is in control... And the way it begins and the way it progresses in our hearts and lives is that we see that this historical survey of God's grace to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Ruth, David, Esther... we see that the culmination of these saving acts is when this God Himself... this Unique and Jealous God was so intent on having us that He came – He entered time and space by taking to himself a true body, and a rational soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin. (Westminster Shorter Catechism 22)

He, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, was the embodiment of grace. He is unique – no other spiritual program has this – a God who enters history and takes responsibility for the failings of His people.

It means that we must be really messed up if that's what it takes to fix us... AND it means that THIS God really, really loves us in way that no ONE or no THING could ever love us. This is "the Love Supreme" a love that is NOT transactional and not controllable but also beautifully compelling and transformative.

Joshua set up a stone to witness against this people who were still stuck in karma... But at the end of God's acts in history is another Monument – a Man hanging to death under the justice that I deserve and who rises to show that my ransom is paid... And this is the witness of grace...it changes the way I think of myself and the way I think about God.

It liberates me to face what's worst in myself – when I am really believing the Great Monument – the Rock of Jesus Christ who witnesses NOT against me but FOR me – then I can stop hiding my flaws and blaming them on others or making excuses or trying in a million different ways to inflate my ego and compare myself to others and compete and live in low-grade denial... INSTEAD, I can say, "Cheer up! I am worse than I think! I cannot serve the LORD!"

But on the other hand – in Jesus Christ, I am so loved and so secure and so significant – amazing love how can it be that Thou, my God shouldst die for me? – IT DOESN'T get any better than that!

None of the modern gods (money, success, applause, pleasure, power, comfort) – these gods that you have to feed and water and keep pumping up like a raft with a big hole in it – these gods that need to be served – none of them can love me as God does in Jesus Christ.

This key to serving God is that FIRST, God must serve YOU! You have to humble yourself and be served. And isn't that what Jesus Christ did in His life, death and resurrection – He washed their feet and He washes our souls. It's humbling.

But when we get that – when we see – “Cheer up – you're a bigger sinner than you thought AND in the Good News you are secure and loved like you've never dreamed – then my heart starts to move toward this Holy God who is committed to me.

I see that He doesn't need my service... but that I and my obedience are His workmanship and His tools to shape me. That's a big difference from religion – that's His commitment to us that liberates our love/service to Him.