

Message #39

Joshua 23:14-16

Years ago a man from Illinois left the wintery frigid cold and snow for a vacation in Florida. His wife was on a business trip and was planning to meet him in Florida the next day. When he got to his motel, he decided to send his wife a quick e-mail. He couldn't find the scrap of paper that had his wife's e-mail address on it so he did his best to type it in by memory.

Unfortunately, he missed one letter in the e-mail address and his note was sent to an elderly preacher's wife, whose husband had just passed away the day before. When the grieving widow checked her e-mail, she looked at the screen and started screaming. She fainted and fell to the floor.

Her children were in the home and when they heard their mother scream, they ran into the room and they saw this note on the screen: "Dearest wife just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Dress light. It sure is hot down here."

I get a kick out of reading or hearing about the thoughts of people who claim to have near death experiences. Whenever they tell their story, the interviewer seems to listen as if in some mystical trance to a bunch of utter nonsense. One person will tell how they saw a bright light, which they were sure was Jesus. Another person claims they are in a boat on some serene lake and they are heading toward the shore on the other side. The thing that amazes me about all of this is that people buy this and believe this and base their whole future on this.

As we come to this part of the book of Joshua, Joshua is about to die. He has been a great leader for God and he has seen God do some amazing things. He has had an incredible life and it is time for him to leave. He fought a good fight; he finished his course and he kept his faith. As he gets ready to leave this world, his mind is focused on one thing. It was not focused on seeing lights. It was not focused on riding in some boat. **It was focused on the written Word of God.**

It is the written Word of God that is so critical for life and for death. It is the written Word of God that is so critical to blessing and cursing. It is the written Word of God that is so critical for salvation and condemnation.

What we see here is a faithful man of God who is ready to go into eternity and his focus is on God's written Word. What we learn here is this:

THE KEY TO BLESSING IN LIFE AND THE KEY TO FACING DEATH IS AN INTENSE FOCUS ON AND AN INTENSE COMMITMENT TO THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD.

When God's people develop a strong and sound mind that is totally focused on God's Word, life and death may be faced in a very solid way. Now there are two main thoughts Joshua communicates here:

THOUGHT #1 – Joshua informs the people that it is time for him to die. **23:14a**

Someone has observed that the greatest danger in our lives is not that we will lose our health, our family or our friends; it is that we will lose our focus on God's Word that will demolish our faith.

I don't want to just gloss over this. Joshua basically says here, I am going to die almost as a brief afterthought and then challenges the people to an intense dedication to God's written Word.

We are literally reading the words of a dying man here and his only concern is that there continues to be an intense passion for God's written Word. Joshua is on the verge of dying and his focus is on getting people to understand the importance of God's Word.

Now when he says, "I am going the way of all the earth" there is deep doctrinal thinking here. No matter how great the man of God, no matter how deep the man of God, no matter how successful the man of God, no matter what the accomplishments, the truth is "all" die. Why? Because all men on this earth have sinned and death is a penalty for sin (Rom. 5:12).

Joshua knew that doctrine. He knew that all men who live on this earth die and he knew the reason why they die is because "all" have sinned.

When we check the history of some of the great men of God, his assessment is true. Moses died. Joshua died. David died. Solomon died. Isaiah died. Daniel died. Paul died. Luther died. Calvin died. Spurgeon died. Moody died. Scofield died. Chafer died and if the Lord carries so will we.

Great men of God do not live life in some delusional fog. They know the reality of death. When King David was about to die, he said exactly the same thing Joshua said (I Kings 2:2).

When Martin Luther was on his deathbed, it is said that three times he said, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit. Thou has redeemed me, O God of truth."

As he was actually dying it is said that he repeated John 3:16 and also Psalm 68 that says, "Our God is the God of whom cometh salvation. God is the Lord by whom we escape death."

When Jonathan Edwards died, it is said that his last words were "Where is Jesus, my never-failing friend?"

When his son, Jonathan Edwards Jr. died, he said, "Trust in God and you have nothing to fear."

THOUGHT #2 – Joshua informs the people that not one word of God will ever fail. **23:14b-16**

Great men of God do die, but God's Word does not die. God's Word lives on. There is rich doctrine in every phrase of these verses.

It is clear that in Joshua's mind every word in God's written Word is important. Every word in God's written Word is good. Every word in God's Word is God's Word and not one of His words will ever fail. Everything God says will happen just the way God says it will happen.

Now in **verse 14**, Joshua says something interesting to God's people. He says you know this truth about God's word "in all your hearts and in all your souls."

In other words, deep in the heart and soul of the people of God there is an implant concerning the written Word of God. Deep in the heart and soul of the people of God is the realization that God's Word is true and it will never fail. None of God's words have ever failed.

I find it interesting that he stresses the importance of even "one word." The Bible is a book filled with a bunch of words and each and every word that makes up the book is in fact God's Word and not one thing in His Word will ever fail.

Now there are three powerful points Joshua makes about God's Word:

Point #1 - God will fulfill every good word in His Word. **23:15a**

This is a wonderful theme. Everything good that God promises He will do in His Word, He will do. He will fulfill everything. He will fulfill it literally. From meeting the needs of His people to the creation of a New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem, He will do it. From saving a sinner who believes in His Son to giving Israel her Promised Land, He will do it. He will reward those who have been faithful and made sacrifices for Him.

Now let's stop and think about some of the things that God's good Word promises us:

- 1) He promises salvation to any who will believe on Jesus Christ. John 3:36; Acts 16:31
- 2) He promises forgiveness to His people when they fail, if they confess their sin. I John 1:9
- 3) He promises that He knows what we need in life and will always provide it. Heb. 13:5
- 4) He promises that He will reward those who labor for Him and that serving Him is not in vain. I Cor. 15:58
- 5) He promises that if we generously give to His Word, He will give us many blessings. II Cor. 9:6-9
- 6) He promises that He will take care of all our worries because He cares for us. I Pet.5:7
- 7) He promises that He will take us to be with Him and we will share in all of His glory. John 14:1-3

These are just some of the good words He has promised to His people. Frankly those are good words, those are great words.

Point #2 - God will fulfill every threatening word in His Word. **23:15b**

The final couple of chapters in the book of Joshua really emphasize the “conditionality” of the blessings of God. Now ultimately Israel will unconditionally have this Promised Land. That will happen when Jesus Christ returns and makes that happen.

But in the meantime, until Christ returns, there is a responsibility that God’s people have to understand and obey the Scriptures. Experiencing the blessings of God is contingent upon this point. This fact was clearly stated by Moses in Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

We are going to heaven based on faith in Jesus Christ. That is an unconditional guarantee. But experiencing God’s blessings on earth now is conditioned upon our response to His precious Word.

There was another perspective Joshua had of the Word of God. Just as the promises in God’s Word are true, so are the threats. **If God fulfills every positive promise, He will also fulfill every negative judgment.**

Just because one has been the recipient of God’s blessings does not mean one is immune from God’s judgments.

The Bible is not only filled with words that are good, but they are also filled with words that are intimidating and threatening.

Now God had permitted Israel to enter this land and just as He took her into the land, He could take her out of the land. The Bible does not portray God as being an anything goes Person who will not judge. If God gives threats and warnings to His own people, they had better take notice because He will fulfill every one of them.

Now the truth is all the words of God are good, even those that threaten. What makes them good is that obedience to God’s Word brings His blessings; but disobedience can bring about His cursing. The good part of this is it makes God’s people desirous of obeying His Word.

God will always be true to His threats. All threats are futuristic, due to the longsuffering and patience of God.

God is a God of condemnation. God is a God of love and wrath. There is real hell. There is real eternal fire. There are real people who will burn in the Lake of Fire.

Point #3 - God will be angry and punish those who disobey His Word. **23:16**

Contrary to what many would have people believe, God's Word says He is not a God of total toleration and people can do things that anger Him and when they do, He does some very negative things. God can cause someone's world to fall apart real fast. If God's people anger God, He can pull the plug on His blessings real fast. Angering God is not casual, light matter to God. One who causes God's anger to burn is at serious risk.

God is a God who will carry out quick, swift discipline against His own people (Heb. 12:6). Those who think lightly of God's Word will be quickly removed. God loves to bless His people but He will not bless disobedience. If God's people begin to turn away from Him and His Word, He can and will pull the plug on His blessings.

Right now Israel is not in her land, enjoying her land because God has pulled the plug on His blessings. Let that be a warning to us. He can pull our blessings away just as fast.

Joshua was about to die and he wanted to stress the importance of Israel respecting and obeying God's written Word. It was their key to survival.

PARTING THOUGHTS

- 1) When it comes time to go into eternity, what we did with the written Word of God will be all that truly matters.**
- 2) God's written Word is all good for all people.**
- 3) God will perfectly fulfill every promise that is in His written Word.**
- 4) God will perfectly fulfill every threat that is in His written Word.**
- 5) God will bless His people if they obey His written Word.**
- 6) God will punish His people if they do not obey His written Word.**