

They Can Run, But They Can't Hide

Joshua 10:16-27

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, August 13th 2023

We come to another one of those passages that Christians sometimes stumble over. People wonder why God curses the wicked to destruction. Why does He bring judgments in history and in eternity? Why doesn't God just forgive everyone and be done with it? After all, He is omnipotent and He certainly could save everyone. But God alone has the prerogative to be God and to do what He wants to do. Romans 9:18 says it rather bluntly: "Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens." God has chosen to manifest not only His attributes of mercy, grace, and love, but also His attributes of wrath, judgment, and hatred for evil. And some people think that just isn't fair. Well, fairness would require *everyone* to go to hell. I'm glad God did not play fair and that He saved me. I certainly didn't deserve it.

But many people must think that humans don't deserve the judgments found in Joshua. And in saying that they just expose how blind they are to the sinfulness of sin. I have liberal books in my library that absolutely reject the God of Joshua. They say that Joshua presents God as a God of wrath and of judgment whereas the New Testament presents God as a God of mercy, love, tenderness, and caring. But any Evangelical worth his salt will point out that the book of Joshua has already richly demonstrated the same mercy, love, tenderness and caring that the New Testament does and that the New Testament shows the same wrath, judgment, and hatred for sin that Joshua does. Jesus promised to bring His savage wrath on that generation who crucified Him. And He did. Revelation describes it in gruesome detail.

Here's the thing: people can make a god in their own image, but it is not the God of the Universe with whom you will have to deal. And I think God deliberately includes passages like this one to test our faith. Is our faith in the real God of the Universe or in a fake god of our own imagination?

Until we believe in God's judgments and accept them into the root of our soul, we will not fully appreciate God's blessing of heaven. This is a passage which helps us to meditate on those two contrasts, and in doing so, to rejoice in our salvation with exceeding great joy. Let's just go through the passage verse by verse and draw out nine lessons that are just as true today as they were back then. And as we go through the passage, keep in mind the earlier lesson that Joshua (or if you prefer the Hebrew pronunciation - Yeshua) is a type of Jesus (the real Jesus; the manly Jesus, not the fake Jesus of the liberals). And Jesus' Hebrew name is also Yeshua.

I. They can run, but they can't hide (vv. 16-17)

First lesson: God guarantees that though the wicked can run from Yeshua, they cannot successfully hide. Verses 16-17:

But these five kings had fled and hidden themselves in a cave at Makkedah. And it was told Joshua saying, "The five kings have been found hidden in the cave at Makkedah.

This was their judgment day and they unsuccessfully tried to escape from judgment. Men have the illusion that they will not have to face judgment from Christ, but they will, both in history and in eternity. Yes, current politicians get away with crimes for quite some time, but God knows how to expose them to the whole world. And He is beginning to do it. Our God is not just a God who will judge at the end of history. I praise God that He also frequently judges *in* history. Moses warned Israel that they would not get away with disobedience, saying, "be sure your sin will find you out" (Numb. 32:23). He was basically saying that sinners will eventually be exposed. And I want to deal with the psychological dread of judgment. The Bible says that when it is imminent, people dread it. When it is not imminent, they try to put it out of their minds. But this fear of death keeps men from the kind of boldness that they could otherwise have. And we will break this down into two sub-points.

A. The five kings went from confidence (v. 4) to fear (v. 16)

B. In contrast, these Israelites were able to be bold even in the face of God's judgments (v. 11)

The first sub-point says, "The five kings went from confidence (v. 4) to fear (v. 16)." The second sub-point says, "In contrast, these Israelites were able to be bold even in the face of God's judgments (v. 11)." Let's compare those two attitudes because I think we can learn from them.

In verse 11 the Israelite soldiers were seeing large hailstones (or more probably - based on the literal Hebrew, meteorites) that were flying down all around them as God's judgments fell on the Amorites. We saw last week that the hail killed tens of thousands of Amorites, yet did not hit one single Israelite soldier. It was a miracle. But at the time that these hailstones or meteorites were falling, the individual Israelites might not have known that they would not be hit. So what gave them boldness even when meteorites were flying past their heads? What gave them boldness even though they were outnumbered by the enemy? You could say that it was a confidence that God was fighting on their behalf. But I think there is more to it than that because Israelites had lost lives in previous battles and would lose lives again. God doesn't guarantee that we won't die. In fact, He has determined the exact day that each of us will die. Yet we can have the same boldness that these Israelites had because whatever happens to us, we are secure in Christ. Death is not something we need to fear since death simply ushers us into an even more beautiful life. I think it was this boldness and ability to die well that made the Calvinistic armies of Europe fearless, and which put fear into the hearts of their enemies as the Calvinists marched into battle singing the war Psalms with gusto. They displayed a confidence that was altogether lacking in the lives of unbelievers.

Oh, sure, unbelievers can have confidence when things are going their way. There was a degree of confidence that *these* kings had in verse 4 when they summoned the rest of their

coalition to battle. But it quickly turned to terror as they saw God's judgments taking out their armies with the hailstones. Rather than courageously fighting with their armies, all five kings tried to rescue themselves by hiding from the hail in caves. And notice that they didn't invite the rest of the army with them. They were just saving their own skin. In part it may have been because they had no certain knowledge of what would happen to them should they die.

And my question to you is, Do you have the confidence of these Israelites? Are you confident that your life is hidden with Christ in God? Are you confident that it is secure? Do you know with certainty that if you were to die today you would be let into heaven? If not, please talk to Michael, or Gary, or me. You can have that confidence. There is no need to be terrified by the thought of death. Are you like these kings who did not have anything worth dying for? It's only as our security is in Jesus and as we are assured of our eternal salvation, that we can entrust our lives to Christ now (no matter what the difficulty) and do it with confidence.

II. God knows how to reserve the wicked for a day of judgment

But there is another contrast that we see here. Look at verse 18. So Joshua said, "Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave, and set men by it to guard them." Yeshua, the son of Nun, did not have time to mess with these kings right now. He had other business to attend to. In fact, he had a purpose for keeping them alive for a bit. They were being reserved unto judgment. There were others who were being reserved unto judgment in verse 20. It speaks of those who escaped entering fortified cities. But what happens to those fortified cities later in the book of Joshua? They were destroyed. These people had a slight reprieve, but they were simply being reserved by God unto a later judgment.

Christians sometimes struggle with why it is that God leaves Hitlers in power for so long; or leaves regimes like that of Northern Sudan in power so long to rape and pillage and maim and imprison and slaughter Christians. It seems that they have escaped God's judgments altogether. But Christ assures us that such people will always be judged. 2 Peter 2:9 says, "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment [so they are not escaping all punishment in history - but God reserves the unjust under punishment] for the day of judgment." He knows how to reserve them. And we need to have confidence that the greater Yeshua has His reasons for reserving His enemies rather than instantly judging them.

III. God knows how to preserve the righteous for dominion (v. 28)

But the flip side of the coin is that God knows how to *preserve* the righteous for dominion. Not only are the ungodly reserved for judgment, but the righteous are preserved for God's purposes in history. Look at verse 21: "And all the people returned to the camp, to Joshua at Makkedah, in peace." All the people returned to Yeshua just like all of Christ's sheep will return to the greater Yeshua. The Lord not only knows how to reserve the ungodly, but He

knows how to preserve the righteous. We call this the preservation of the saints. It's God's preserving of us that enables us to persevere.

But this idea of preservation is a remarkable idea. In history, you are invincible until it is God's time for you to die. You can't die one second earlier. And as to your salvation, no one can pluck you out of the Father's hand. You are preserved. Christ said, "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day." Christ will not lose *any* of His elect. Amen? They are invincible in His Almighty hand. So this is a second reason why the righteous should take courage and the ungodly should fear. But let's move on.

IV. God does not want us to settle for partial victories - press the advantage. No negotiations - Humanists are always a continuing danger (vv. 19-20)

Verse 19 begins:

And do not stay there yourselves, but pursue your enemies, and attack their rear ranks; do not allow them to enter their cities, for the LORD your God has delivered them into your hand.

Do not stay there yourselves. What Joshua was telling the Israelites is that they must not settle for partial victories. They must not stop the battle simply because they have captured the kings. They must press the advantage. The temptation for lazy humans is to be happy with a success like they already had and to leave it at that. They had these kings trapped. They had deprived the enemy of its power. What more could they want?

And I tell you, that is the attitude of so many when it comes to their battle against their fleshly desires. They are maybe motivated to fight real hard when there is an ugly, socially disgraceful sin that has captivated them. They are motivated to get past that. But the moment they gain some degree of victory over *that* particular enemy, they slack off and leave alone the socially acceptable sins. They give up their disciplines at sanctification. Why? Because there is nothing pressing anymore. The big enemy is temporarily down; its on the run, the pressure is off, and they want relief from the responsibilities to conquer their sin nature. But you know what? Just like Joshua, God calls us to press the advantage we have gained to make even further strides in our sanctification. There is no vacation from warfare with our flesh. God wants us to mop up all the enemy. There can be no substitute for total victory.

What is your attitude toward your war against the flesh? Are you satisfied when you get issues to a place where others respect you, or is God's call of sanctification much louder in your ears? If your standard for righteousness is that others are pleased, that's a social righteousness. That's not enough. Too many Christians settle for an outward holiness; a social holiness; a holiness that other people can see and respect, but they are unwilling to keep pressing against the flesh to please God. So that's one contrast: the contrast between

those who settle for partial victories and those who keep pressing toward the mark of the upward call that we have in Christ Jesus.

But the same is true in the Great Commission. We can't be satisfied with a few victories. Praise the Lord for the victories, but rather than letting such victories make us take our ease, it ought to motivate us to keep pressing on in missions until the Great Commission is completely fulfilled.

V. Christ will ensure that there will always be sufficient enemies left that we never grow soft (v. 20)

The next point says, "Christ will ensure that there will always be sufficient enemies left that we never grow soft." Do you wonder why God allows some opposition? This point may explain one reason. Look at verse 20: "Then it happened, while Joshua and the children of Israel made an end of slaying them with a very great slaughter, till they had finished, that those who escaped entered fortified cities." Why did God let some escape? I want you to turn to Judges 2 to see one of the many places that explain God's strategy. God allowed full occupation of the land, but God made sure that there would always be some enemy to challenge Israel. Judges 2, and let's begin reading at verse 20.

Judg. 2:20 Then the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, 21 I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, 22 so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the LORD, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not." 23 Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua.

Judg. 3:1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, that He might test Israel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan 2 (this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it), 3 namely, five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath. 4 And they were left, that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

Judg. 3:5 Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.

Up until the time of the Judge Othniel they failed this test. But several times in this section God gives His reasons for leaving some enemies: First, to test whether Israel would depend upon Him when the pressure was off. Second, to teach Israel godly principles of warfare. And third, to give Israel opportunity to show the grace of perseverance even when times were good.

And let me assure you that it is hardest to persevere when times are good. You tend to let down your guard. When did David fall into sin with Bathsheba? It was when things had gotten so good that he relaxed, he stopped fighting, he became lazy and let down his guard. And this happens with Christians today. The moment some besetting sin is holed up in a cave where it is no longer doing any damage, these Christians stop beginning their day with intense prayer, they stop memorizing Scripture, they stop meditation, they stop spiritual warfare, and they either have a relapse with the same sin or they end up falling into some new error. It's not enough to put off sins; you've also got to put on new habits of righteousness or there will be a vacuum. - a vacuum that will suck the old sins back. Jay Adams calls it dehabitation and rehabituation. You've got to replace the old habits with new habits.

VI. God gives His people peace, and afflicts His enemies with fear. (v. 21)

Well, let's go back to Joshua 10 because the passage in Judges is only discouraging because of the disobedience of the people. The presence of enemies in the land should never discourage us. When we are walking rightly with God, God will bring us through; He will give us peace and He will keep the enemies in check. Look at verse 21

And all the people returned to the camp, to Joshua at Makkedah, in peace. No one moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel.

The word for "peace" is Shalom. It not only speaks of reprieve from conflict, but also speaks of wholeness and prosperity. At this point the Canaanites were completely held in check. Not only were they not sharpening spears to use against them, they dared not even sharpen their tongues against Israel. The literal rendering of the Hebrew is that "No one sharpened his tongue against any of the children of Israel."

What an encouraging lesson this is. God does not leave enemies in the land to defeat us. He leaves enemies in the land to give us something to successfully fight against in the future. But we need not fight against them in fear. Each victory God gives you over your flesh is designed to give you that much more confidence in your new battles. And it is designed to demoralize the world, the flesh and the devil.

One of the things that I found when I worked in the crusty environment of the lumber mill and in a later union job was that people were constantly trying to get me to compromise. When I first hired on and they found out I was a Christian, it was almost like a fun challenge for them to try to get me to sin. They would increase their filthy talk when I was around, flash pornography at me, put up blasphemy on my locker, threaten to get me fired if I didn't stop working so hard since it made them look bad, and in any way they could, they would seek to get me down. But as my integrity was evidenced and my gracious response from the Scriptures began having effects, some started even defending me, and others were ashamed to sharpen their tongues against me - mainly because it backfired against them. It made them look bad.

But let's also apply this principle to our personal fight against sin. Initially it may seem like a life and death struggle as we seek to overcome besetting sins. As we begin the battle against the flesh, we find that the flesh fights back for all its worth. Its roaring. But over time, its cries become whimpers and then whispers and become quieter and quieter until finally we have peace. We go on to another fleshly impulse, and we find the flesh fighting again. But the more consistent we are, the less able the flesh is to fight against us. And eventually we find ourselves winning battles in seconds instead of weeks. The temptations are still there, but we are quicker to deal with them. God gives us peace, and He puts the fleshly impulses into check. And that is so encouraging. But the warning that Judges gives is that if we give up on the battle and are content with past victories, the flesh gets its confidence back and we find any renewed battles are battles with a roaring enemy.

Never feed your enemy the flesh; never give in to its desires. The more you feed desire, the more it grows into a powerful enemy. But when you are walking by faith with the armor of God, your flesh will remain subdued and unable to resist very valiantly.

VII. He promises us total victory and dominion (vv. 22-24) Our striving should be governed by that reality, not our present success.

But we have even further encouragement in verses 22-24. Not only is there this weakening of the enemy in its resistance, but we have God's renewed promise of total victory and dominion. Let's read verses 22-24

Josh. 10:22 ¶ Then Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out those five kings to me from the cave." Josh. 10:23 And they did so, and brought out those five kings to him from the cave: the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. Josh. 10:24 So it was, when they brought out those kings to Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the captains of the men of war who went with him, "Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings." And they drew near and put their feet on their necks.

It's Joshua, or Yeshua, who bids them to put their feet on the necks of their enemies. It was a sign of dominion and conquest. And Hebrews says that this Yeshua is a symbol of the later Yeshua, Jesus. What does the New Testament say about dominion? It says that all things have been legally placed under Christ's feet. But He shares that right to take dominion with us. He says that all things will be placed under our feet and under our dominion. Romans 16:20 promises the Christians at Rome that they will conquer Satan in that region shortly. It says, "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly." And He did. Rome fell to the Gospel despite incredible persecution. The Great Commission is the promise that we will share in Christ's dominion over all nations.

But does this dominion extend to our battle against the flesh? Some people are skeptical that it does, but yes, it absolutely does. Romans 6:14 says, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Don't let sin put its feet on your neck and put you into bondage. You must defeat sin. Verse 18 says, "And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

In other words you have voluntarily put your necks under Christ's feet. That's what gives you power to subdue sin. So verses 12-13 say,

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Just as this Yeshua promised total dominion and told those saints to begin acting upon the dominion given to them, Jesus has promised the same dominion to each of us and tells us to act upon that dominion. Bring those besetting sins out of the cave and give them to Jesus. Let Him execute those lusts. And by faith don't get discouraged. By faith put your feet on those sins and say, "You are finished. I am taking away from you the years that you have ravaged. I am taking away from you the broken relationships you have caused. Sin, I am taking dominion from you and I am claiming all that you have destroyed, and I am doing it by the power of King Jesus." Can you do that? Put your feet upon the necks of every lust that is ruling your life right now. But to do that, you have got to humble yourself by taking those sins out of hiding, exposing them to the light so that all can see, confessing your sins and bringing them to Yeshua.

VIII. Present victories are downpayments of final victory (v. 25)

There are two more points. The next point is pretty simple. It says that present victories are down-payments of continuing victory and of a final victory. Look at verse 25.

Then Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight."

Present and past victories are not the end. They are the down-payments or assurances of continued victory. But they are also the down-payment of full and final victory in eternity. God will not rest until every enemy submits to Jesus. And I am looking forward to the day when in heaven I will be freed from every vestige of sin. Amen?

IX. God's curse and wrath bring both fear and comfort

Let's end with the odd symbolism in verses 26-27.

Josh. 10:26 And afterward Joshua struck them and killed them, and hanged them on five trees; and they were hanging on the trees until evening. Josh. 10:27 So it was at the time of the going down of the sun that Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees, cast them into the cave where they had been hidden, and laid large stones against the cave's mouth, which remain until this very day.

Joshua did this as a symbol of God's curse upon all who resist God. Deuteronomy 21:23 says, "he who is hanged is accursed of God." Galatians 3:13 says, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." It was a symbol of the horrible terror and cursing that will come upon all who are outside of Christ.

And this teaches us an important lesson about God. God hates sin, and God has every right to curse those who are sinners. Scripture speaks far more of cursing than it does of blessing. It speaks far more of God's holiness than it does of His love. It speaks far more of His justice than it does of His mercy; far more of His wrath than it does of His compassion. God's curse rests upon all who are not believers.

And if you die without ever having submitted your neck under Jesus's feet, Jesus will curse you to hell on judgment day. The Gibeonites submitted to Yeshua and were not only spared, but they were fighting side by side with Israel. The curse was taken away by Jesus. But of all others, Matthew 25:42 says, "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Galatians 3:10 says, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.'" God's cursing is a real thing.

We know that the Israelites were sinners as well, right? Why were *they* not cursed? The answer is found in Joshua 8. The curses were read from God's word to Israel, but the curse bounced off of them because a substitute bore that curse in their place. That substitute was symbolized by the sacrifices. Those sacrifices pointed to Jesus. They trusted in Jesus, the coming Messiah who would bear their sins. As they offered up a sheep or a bull upon the altar it symbolized Jesus who would die in their place. It foreshadowed the work of Jesus who would bear the curse for all who trust in Him. And if Jesus is cursed for you, you will never have to be cursed. Praise God.

Unlike some human courts, double jeopardy is not allowed in God's court room. As one hymn words it, "Jesus bore the price that law could never demand twice." All for whom Christ died will be saved or you have double jeopardy; you have an injustice against Jesus. Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')" Christ was cursed on the tree till sundown so that you would never have to face the wrath of God. Have you trusted Him for your salvation?

If you *have* trusted Jesus, then realize that it was not just Jesus that was nailed to that tree. Scripture says that your flesh was also nailed to that tree, and it no longer has dominion over you. Romans 6:6 says, "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." Your fleshly impulses which used to be kings in your life were crucified with Christ, buried in the tomb and sealed up.

And so the curse pictured here not only instills fear into the hearts of rebels, but is a comfort to those who believe. Never think that God's right to curse should be limited. Cursing is at the heart of what the Gospel is about. Deny the curse and you deny the need for the Gospel. Deny the curse, and you blaspheme the cross. For Christ to climb the cross

when there was no need for the curse is to trivialize His crucifixion. And to continue sinning when Christ bore God's curse is to trivialize your sin. As Hebrews says, it is to trample under foot the blood of Christ once again. The curse of God must be understood before we will fully appreciate the beauty of our salvation. Let's rejoice that God's curse was compatible with His love for His elect. Amen.