

This morning I would like to resume our study through the Old Testament Book of Joshua... by first... having you take a look with me at a section from the New Testament. ... Please turn with me to Matthew chapter 11... as we begin today.

Matthew 11:28

That sounds wonderful ! I can use the rest... can't you...? ... Life can feel very stressful in days like these. ... But just as I am starting to feel comforted... with the idea that the Lord wants to give me rest... I read on... into the very next verse... which jars me with a paradox...

Matthew 11:29-30

Jesus says... *"I will give you rest... Now here put this yoke on..."* ... Is He referring to the same kind of yoke that oxen wear... as they laboriously plow a field...? ANSWER: Yes... yes... He is!

So... how does this work... that He gives me rest... by putting me in a drudging work yoke...?

I was reading an article this week from Leadership Magazine. Dr. Paul Brandt (the missionary Doctor to India... who actually discovered the cure for leprosy) was extensively quoted. ... Dr. Brandt was commenting on this idea of Jesus giving us rest... by placing a yoke around our necks. ... He speaks from experience of being around oxen working in India... and even himself... fashioning a yoke... once... in a woodshop. ... Here are some excerpts from that article :

The most common suggestion for resolving the dilemma is that oxen work in teams, and Jesus shares the other side of the yoke. But I see no hint of that explanation in the Bible passage. I have, however, spent much of my life studying "weary and burdened" living tissue in a country, India, where yoke and oxen are commonplace. Because of those experiences, I think I now understand this passage.

If I put a flat, uncarved piece of wood on an ox's neck and use it to pull a cart, very quickly pressure sores will break out on that animal's neck, and he will be useless. A good yoke must be formed to the shape of an ox's neck. It should cover a large area of skin to distribute the stresses widely. It should also be smooth, rounded, and polished with no sharp edges, so that no one point will endure unduly high stress. If I succeed in my workshop, the yoke I make will fit snugly around the ox's neck and cause him no discomfort. He can haul heavy loads every day for years, and his skin will remain perfectly healthy, with no pressure sores.

And now, I think I understand the strange juxtaposition of phrases in (Matthew 11:28-29). Jesus offers each of us a well-fitted yoke, of custom design. He does not call us to the kind of rest that means inactivity or laziness--that would lead to spiritual atrophy. Instead, he promises a burden designed to fit my frame, my individual needs, strengths, and capabilities. I come to him weary and heavy-laden. He removes those crushing burdens that would destroy any human being, and replaces them with a yoke of appropriate stress designed specifically for me. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me," he says, "for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

In our study in the Book of Joshua... God is giving Israel – “rest.” The final verse in our study today mentions that they finally had rest... shalom. ... But as we will see... this is not a rest that means complete inactivity or laziness... just as the rest that Jesus gives to us... is not inactivity or laziness. But he puts you and I in a yoke... of suitable stress that is precisely calculated and constructed for us.

Ephesians 2:8-10 (ESV)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Please read verse 10 out loud with me...

¹⁰ *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Today we see the themes of... promise – activity... warfare – rest... These are all kept in tension throughout our passage... Joshua chapter 11.

Today also brings us to the middle of this book. ... Joshua 11:23 is the exact midpoint... and it tells us that Israel has been given “rest.”

But let’s start at the beginning of chapter 11... with the final major contention that Israel had to face... in order to have rest.

From where we left off... the last time... in chapter 10... Joshua and the Israelites had just conquered the central and southern territories of Canaan. ... The strategy that God had led Joshua to... had been to spearhead FIRST a campaign across the middle of Canaan... which divided the land. Northern cities and Southern cities could not band together in a strong alliance against Israel. Then it was to sweep down and conquer the southern portion... and next... to move against the northern coalition of city-states.

As we come to Joshua chapter 11... the central and southern campaigns have ended... and Israel has been victorious. ... Now... only the northern city-states need to be taken. ... But this task would not to be easy. ... The strongest fortresses and armies were in the north. ... Also... please stop

and consider... these northern kingdoms would be prepared. They were well aware that the Lord God had promised to give the land of Canaan to the Israelites as their inheritance.

Joshua 11:1-5

Verse 1 begins with... "*When Jabin, King of Hazor heard of this...*" ...Heard of what...? ... Heard of Israel's successful military campaign... now in control of central and southern Canaan.

This is the sixth time that the hearing by a Canaanite leader... of Israel's exploits... is mentioned in Joshua (Joshua 2:10, 5:1, 9:1, 9:9, 10:1 and now here in 11:1). ... Most of the "*heard*" responses in Joshua were negative. That is... the people did not repent but became hostile to God's people... the Israelites. ...There were some exceptions such as Rahab and (we might be able to build a case for the Gibeonites... as we see their blending into Hebrew culture)... but generally the hearings resulted in hostilities. ... It is still the same today. Most reactions to God's message in the Bible are negative. ... And today... God sometimes speaks in great disasters... but instead of repentance to God... people rage against God.

Here in chapter 11... we find the largest (in terms of people) and the most powerful coalition of nations to face Joshua. ... Everything about this battle is massive. ... The opponent is more numerous than sand on the seashore. (Figuratively speaking of course!) ... Jabin is the most powerful potentate in all of Canaan. ... And Hazor is the most imposing city. ... (Modern archeological digs there have revealed that Hazor was a little more than

two hundred acres... in size. In contrast, Jericho was only four or five acres in size.)

Here we find the last great Canaanite coalition... rising up to oppose God's people... led by King Hazor. ... Did he assume that Israel was too tired to fight? ... Did he conclude that the central and southern regions lost because they had no chariots or horses? ... This coalition assembles from the whole land.... the mountains... the plains... the valley... and the border. This by far was the most bloody and violent battle. ... The first Century historian... Josephus... records there were 300,000 infantry... (you can fill the largest college football stadium at the University of Michigan – **3 times!** – with that number.) But then there was also 100,000 cavalry troops (fill up the Wolverine Stadium again!) Have you ever been in a major college football stadium that was full? Just picture the nations largest... and fill it 4 times... “as numerous as the granules of sand on the seashore” is a good mental picture for us... And then they had stock-piled 20,000 chariots. This was the most formidable foe that Israel has faced so far in terms of troop size and weaponry. ... God's people have never faced an army like this.

This was a final effort by the enemy to stop the Israelites from entering the promised land. ...The enemy mobilized to defeat and destroy the Israelites... to keep them from securing their inheritance in the promised land. Spiritually... we can see this as the picture of a last-ditch effort of our enemy (Satan) to defeat and destroy you and I as believers. He more easily succeeds in robbing us of our peace... when we cling to the wrong understanding of the “rest” that Jesus gives.

Have you been noticing... that from Jericho onward... each successive battle that Israel has fought... has been more *difficult* than the one before... It's true! ... And this one is the most overwhelming... the most frightening. The odds against Israel seemed overwhelming...

Now let me tell you something. Most often... this is also true of our spiritual life. ... We are led to successive spiritual battles of greater and greater challenge. ... The “rest” that Christ promises us... is not inactivity or laziness... but we have been fitted with a perfect yoke for us.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Think carefully about verses 1-5 for a moment... Have you ever wondered why the writer spills so much ink... and wanders into such particular detail? Why he takes up so much of our time to specify various kings... to identify locations... to indicate ethnic groups opposing Israel? ... Does anyone *else* get weary of trying to pronounce the names of all those “ites”? ... Why does he dwell on the massing of their numbers and their armaments? ... Why didn't the writer give you and me a break... and make our Bibles lighter... by simply saying... 'The King of Hazor summoned his confederates and their armies in order to make a massive assault on Israel'?

Because if he did... the text would lose its punch. ... You see... it is precisely in reading this extended... detailed, particularizing description of Israel's opposition... that you begin to feel how overwhelming the enemy is... to sense in line-upon-line... the almost hopeless situation Israel faces.

(LISTEN!) ... More often than we realize... the Holy Spirit... wants to impress our imaginations... rather than to merely inform our brains. Don't you LOVE it... that He does?!

I see this as the Holy Spirit's attempt to impress us all... that the massive resources available to the enemies of God... only makes the power of God shine more brightly... as He delivers His people from their hands. By our clearly seeing both Canaan's numerical... and technological edge... we realize that Yahweh's strong right arm... is no empty metaphor. ... By the way... Look how God has prepared them for this fight. God has already said to Israel...

Deuteronomy 20:1 (ESV)

“When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

Jabin and all of his confederates were gathering at the waters of Merom. This was a small lake (about 3 x 2 miles) in upper Galilee. It makes perfect sense why they gathered at that spot... because it was not too far from Israel's camp at Gilgal... and it had enough fresh water for all of their horses. ... But there was a problem with this location... which Joshua and the Army of Israel exploited. ... The waters of Merom were in the hill country... about 4,000 feet above sea level. Chariot warfare cannot be effective... unless it is on *flat* ground. They were obviously only staging their forces up there and intended to come down to the plains to engage Israel in battle.

It is not hard to discern that their plan... after organizing their detachments and adopting a strategy... was to sweep down the Jordan Valley and attack Joshua at Gilgal. ... But Joshua did not wait for the battle to come to him... he was in fact already marching toward Merom... a five-day trek from his home base. ... And as he marched he had a lot of time to think about the immense array awaiting him. ... No doubt he trembled at the prospect of the battle that loomed before him.

With such a large and impressive enemy arrayed for battle, Joshua needed encouragement and God gave him some great encouragement in the form of a promise.

Joshua 11:6-9

God tells Joshua not to be afraid. ... He wouldn't have said that... if Joshua had not been fearful. ... God speaks into the fear... which is very understandable. ... Even though Joshua is a battle-hardened veteran... the fear of the opposition... and the possibility of losing a battle... still wells-up inside of Joshua. ... But God assures Joshua that he has nothing to fear: God will win the battle on Israel's behalf. ... God heads off any fear... insecurity... or hesitancy... at the pass... and gives Joshua a word at the right time. ... In verse 6 he says, "*I will give over all of them, slain.*" ... This means that Israel will have to expend energy and attack Canaanite soldiers. ... Passivity will have no place in this battle.

The Lord provides Joshua with needed encouragement... and Joshua responds immediately! He catches the enemy by surprise... before they can get to level ground... where they would have otherwise had the advantage of their advanced weaponry.

Joshua trusted God... like you and I should. ... Christians must realize... like Joshua... that victory not only involves *conflict*... but *confidence* in the *person* of God... *the promises* of God... and the *power* of God.

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

This is not the first time Joshua employed the strategy of speed to defeat the enemy (We also saw it in Joshua chapters 8 and 10.) ... Procrastination was not part of Joshua or his army. ... Perhaps a side lesson from this would be... that if you wish success in the Lord's work... you must be prompt in doing your duty.

But even more to the point of this passage... is this lesson that we should not miss. ... Divine sovereignty does not negate human activity but stimulates it. God's promise of victory was not a license for inactivity... but just the opposite. ... We frequently look at the teaching of divine sovereignty too simplistically. ... Some will allege that if God ordains something as certain... it renders human effort irrelevant: 'Let go and let God.' ... But Joshua knew better. ... His view was not to let go... but to grab hold.

Divine sovereignty creates confidence... which calls forth our effort... which may sometimes be... even to the point of reckless abandon. ... God's sovereignty is not a doctrine that shackles us... but a reality that liberates us. ... It does not *stifle* – it *invigorates*. ... One more thing that is closely related. ... There is no evidence that God gave Joshua the specific direction to negate Jabin's tactical advantage... by blitzing them on the mountain top. So here is the related principle: "Just because Yahweh promises a victory...

is no reason NOT to use one's brains..." (This was brilliant military strategy... apparently from Joshua's ingenuity!)

The enemy fled in three different directions: north (Zidon/Lebanon), west to the sea coast (Misrephoth-maim), and east (valley of Mizpeh). The routing of the enemy emphasized that the size of the victory was great. ... The Lord gave them into the hand of Israel. The Canaanite coalition is annihilated.

Now the success of Joshua and Israel's army is detailed in Scripture to show the greatness of it. Though a great force was assembled to combat Israel, they were soundly defeated, so much so that Israel now controlled the northern part of Canaan as well as the central and southern parts.

Joshua 11:9

Why did God command... and why did Israel burn the chariots and hamstringing the horses...? ... The most obvious reason is that God did not want the Canaanites to rebuild their military forces... and create future problems for Israel. Just as modern Israel is trying to de-arm Hamas forces along the Gaza Strip today. ... But couldn't Israel build up their own army to greater strength... by confiscating and using those powerful implements of war for that time...? Did they really have to harm all those animals...?

Animal rights activists of our day will condemn the God of the Bible for this action. ... (Let me be clear!) We **should be** concerned about the welfare of God's creatures on this earth... (He has commissioned man to be their caretakers... in Genesis) ... but not as a priority over our faith in God! ... Keeping these animals would have kept the Israelites from placing their full trust in the Lord. ... A full trust in the Lord needs to be our highest priority!

Psalm 20:7 (ESV)

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

I don't think God wanted such weaponry in Israel's arsenal... because He knew they would eventually misperceive their trust. ... They would think they were strong because of their military might. ... And if such weaponry continued to be viable... it would eventually be used against Israel again.

Joshua 11:10-15

We shouldn't pity these kings or their troops... because these people were violently opposed to God... and if they weren't completely destroyed... they would come back at a later date and try to destroy Israel. ... In light of Genesis 15:16... we see that God had already given them 400 years to repent. He left His messengers in the land... priests... like Jethro in Midian... and Melchizedek in Jerusalem... and probably others that the Bible does not mention. ... But the iniquity of these Amorites was completely filled up. The time of mercy and grace was past for them. God said they had to be slain.

We can observe that Joshua seems to be presented as the model of God's servant. There is a hint of this in verse 12, but verse 15 is emphatic: *“Just as the LORD had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses.”*

What verse 15 seems to be saying is: *“Here is a model of God's servant. His chief characteristic is that he obeys God's commands.”* ... That sounds bland and nonthreatening enough... and commonplace. ... But it stands as

a needed witness to Israel's future leaders and kings... (and to individual church leaders of our own day)... that what marks a model leader... is not the size of his chariot force... the number of females in his harem... or the presence of peacocks in the royal zoo... .. It is an obedience to God's commandments that leads God's people to be faithful. ... Surely we must admit that when we get wrapped up in all the glossy and glamorous criteria of today's evangelical success... 1 John 2:3 still cuts through all the flack.

1 John 2:3 (ESV)

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.

The servant of God has no other standard. ... This is not only a high standard... but also a liberating purge... that can eliminate numerous secondary items... from our cluttered agendas.

Joshua left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded. What a testimony! What an example! ... Can this be said of you? ... Is there anything you have left undone in your life... that needs to be dealt with now... such as witnessing to someone... restoring a broken relationship... or doing the will of God? ... Christians are to leave nothing undone which Christ commanded us to do.... God help us to be diligent... earnest... and thorough in any assignment the Lord gives us. ... Don't shirk God's will and word for your life. ... Joshua fulfilled God's command... and Jesus has a perfectly fitted yoke for you.

Joshua 11:16-18

Comparing Scripture with Scripture makes “*long time*” here to be about seven years in length. This will surprise many students of the Bible, for in

reading the accounts of the conquering, it seems like only days or weeks. But this number is calculated from information provided in Scripture about Caleb... Joshua's fellow spy in Numbers 13-14. ... Caleb is with Israel through all of these conquests and is (later) given an inheritance. So... when we are told the age of Caleb in Numbers 13 when he and Joshua were sent by Moses to spy the land... (he was 40)... and knowing that 38 years later they entered Canaan... that would mean Caleb was 78 when they crossed the Jordan River. Now in Joshua 14:10... we are told that Caleb was 85 when his portion of land was given to him... so that leaves 7 years... from the time they entered Canaan... to the time Caleb got his property.

(LISTEN!) ... To do much for God requires time. We do not accomplish great things for God overnight. We often must be willing to stick with a job for a long period of time before we see much fruit.

Joshua 11:19-20

God does not harden people's hearts... until they themselves have already hardened their own hearts... through their rebellion to God and persistent pursuit of sin. ... When God hardens a person's heart... it is an act of judgment for the rebellion of that person against God.

Joshua 11:21-22

Special mention is made of **the Anakites**... the giants who had terrified the spies 45 years before. This race of giants...(beside whom the spies under Moses felt like "grasshoppers" (we read about in Num. 13:33)... terrified 10

of the 12 spies and prompted Israel to shrink back in fear. ... It is fitting to crown the account of the conquest of Canaan... by describing how Joshua has now largely eradicated this frightening threat.

Here God exposes the groundlessness of the fear and unbelief of the Numbers 13 generation. ... Our most dreadful fears are subject to Yahweh's power.

I do not want to trivialise this text by chatting about the giants in your life. But neither do I want to leave this text unapplied. ... Surely this text at least means to assure you and I... that Yahweh's power **is** completely adequate to meet our most dreadful fears. ... Our situation is both different from and similar to Israel's. ... The form of our fears is different... but (LISTEN!)... the adequacy of our God is the same.

No matter how awesome the giants are in our life... Jesus Christ can help us conquer them and give us rest. ... Whether its sinful habits... broken relationships... severe temptation... health problems... financial or marriage problems... the Lord can solve your problems... and get you through your trials.

The summary we read here... verses 16 through 22... reviews seven hard years of consistent opposition in completing the conquest of Canaan. ... The Israelites are always outnumbered and out-gunned. ... They are facing people who hate them. ... The warfare is driven by people whose hearts are hardened against Israel and God. ... The opponents are gigantic... unbeatable foes. ... It's tough through all those years to keep believing God in the face of that kind of opposition.

Do you ever feel ready to throw in the towel? ... As you look at the spiritual opposition in your life... do you feel unrelenting pressure from those around you who would love to pull the rug out from under you in your walk of faith with Jesus Christ? ... Are you faced with a situation in your life that is overwhelming and totally unmanageable from a human perspective? ... It may be a debilitating illness... or perhaps a family crisis that you can't solve. ... Whatever your case... look again at the reassuring conclusion to the first half of this book of Joshua in verse 23...

Joshua 11:23

God has given Canaan to Israel as an inheritance... and the land had rest from war. ... But let me tell you something. ... As we read on in Scripture... the rest of Joshua... and Judges... and Samuel... there will be many more battles. ... Cities remain under Canaanite control... and all of the Canaanites have not been completely driven out.

Joshua and the entire army of Israel has made it possible now... for the individual tribes to do the rest of the work. The hard part is over. As they receive their allotments of property... It is now up to the individual tribes and the clans... working on their own... to drive the enemy completely out of the land. There is still much work to be done... but it has only just now been made possible for it to get accomplished.

Believers... “Rest” does not mean inactivity!

You and I have spiritual ground to gain for God. Conquer the land for the Lord. Conquer....

- the Land of *Your Severed Relationships*. Restore and forgive others.
- the Land of *Sinful Habits*. Repent and forsake those sins.
- the Land of *Selfish Attitudes*. Refocus your fervor on meeting the needs of others. Yield your rights to God.
- the Land of *Scripture and Service for Christ*. Research the Word and put it into practice in your life.
- the Land of *Social Pressure*. Remain firm for the Lord and stand up for Him. Jesus put it this way...

Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Rest... by putting on the yoke Jesus specially designed for you.