

Sermon Outline

“AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”: A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

OBEDIENCE IS HEROIC (JOSHUA 11:15)

I. Introduction

II. Recap (11:1-14)

- A. God gave Israel victory over the greatest confederation of enemies they had faced.
- B. Jabin, king of Hazor, assembled a coalition of nations to resist Israel.
 - 1. Those nations included people of the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, and the Perizzites.
 - 2. Those were the descendants of Canaan who lived north of where Israel was.
 - 3. They had cavalry, horses and chariots.
- C. Nevertheless, the Lord kept his word and fought for his people.
- D. He instructed Israel to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots.
- E. In time, Israel overcame the enemy, in spite of their superior size.
- F. Joshua destroyed the enemy kings and the rest of Israel was able to destroy the rest of the enemy population.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Who was the king who gathered the enemy forces? (2) What tactic did the Lord require Israel to use? (3) What did Joshua do to the enemy population?

III. The Lord Commanded Moses (11:15)

- A. Verse 15 summarizes all that Joshua had done.
- B. The first clause: “Just as the LORD had commanded Moses his servant...”
 - 1. This is essentially a summary of the history of Israel from Exodus onward.
 - 2. It refers to the Lord’s choosing and instructing of Moses.
- C. But a major point, if not the major point of this statement, is the fact that it was *the Lord God* who spoke to Moses.
 - 1. The Lord God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 - 2. The Lord God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and the Maker of all the powers that exist.
 - 3. The fact that the Lord God spoke to Moses implies that he is a merciful God, a God who graciously and generously condescends to his people.
- D. The greatness of God also implies the greatness of Moses.

1. One of the lies in the world today is that the human race can find its way without God.
 2. Secularists want us to say that God is not relevant to our modern way of life; that you can find your own glory and dignity apart from God.
 3. Sometimes, we Christians believe that lie in the murky depths of our souls. That is why we do not pray as we ought, or seek God as we should.
 4. Scripture reminds us that it is only in the light of God that mankind receives his own greatness.
—It is only when we are chosen by God, and loved by God, and instructed by God that we come to our fullness as human beings.
- E. To say that the Lord instructed Moses...
1. implies God's mercy
 2. implies Moses' greatness
—Moses was great not because he was perfect; but because God had chosen him.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Who is the Lord who spoke to Moses? (2) Why does the Lord's addressing Moses make Moses great? (3) Where is true greatness to be found?

IV. Moses Commanded Joshua

- A. And then after we are told that the LORD commanded Moses his servant, we read that "Moses commanded Joshua..."
- B. This statement tells us that Moses was not only faithful to hear God's Word—he was also faithful to impart the Lord's word to Joshua.
1. Numbers 27:18-20:

So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey.

2. Deuteronomy 31:7:

Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it.'

- C. Imparting the Word of God to one another is one of our chief duties.
—Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, *teaching and admonishing one another* in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What was Moses faithful to do? (2) What is the Christian's duty with regard to imparting the Word of God?

V. "And So Joshua Did"

- A. Because Moses was faithful to impart the Word of God to him, Joshua is now able to do what the Lord wants of him—"and so Joshua did."
- B. Joshua obeyed the command to lead the people of God into possession of the land.
- C. Joshua "left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses."
 - 1. Joshua made at least one mistake in the case of the Gibeonites.
 - 2. This verse is not saying that Joshua was perfect.
 - 3. But Joshua was mainly faithful and diligent to do whatever Moses had commanded him to do.
 - 4. By the end of the book, we do see that Joshua had enabled Israel to take possession of the land.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Because Moses was faithful to impart the Word of God, what was Joshua able to do? (2) How does this verse evaluate Joshua's conduct?

VI. The Heroic Obedience of Joshua

- A. This is a good place to take stock of a number of key statements that we have already encountered.
- B. Various obedience passages.
 - 1. Joshua 4:1-4
 - a. The Lord told Joshua to take twelve men from the people of Israel to build a memorial of stones in the midst of the Jordan.
 - b. How does Joshua respond? Joshua obeyed what the Lord told him to do.
—"Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe" (v 4).
 - 2. Joshua 5:3
 - a. The Lord instructs Joshua to make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel.
 - b. How does Joshua respond? Joshua obeyed what the Lord told him to do.
—"So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth."
 - 3. Joshua 8
 - a. The Lord instructs Joshua to take all the fighting men with him and go up to Ai.
 - b. What does Joshua do? Again, he obeys.
—"So Joshua and all the fighting men arose to go up to Ai" (8:3)
 - 4. Joshua 8:30
 - a. "At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, *just as Moses the servant of the LORD had*

commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, ‘an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool.’...”

- b. Yet again, obedience on the part of Joshua.
- 5. Joshua 11:9: “And Joshua did to them *just as the LORD said to him*: he hamstringed their horses and burned their chariots with fire.
- C. From those verses, we learn that Joshua was a man who lived for the Lord.
- D. The commendation of Joshua’s conduct shows what God values in his children.

—God is delighted by obedience. God loves the human being who responds to his love and his commandments with joyful trust and zealous obedience. And this is the kind of heroism that God the Father is looking for.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What do the various obedience passages teach us about Joshua? (2) What does Scripture’s commendation of Joshua teach us about what pleases God?

VII. Why We Need the Greater Heroism of Obedience

- A. The idea that true heroism or greatness lies in obedience is very instructive for us.
- B. It speaks to some very popular, pervasive assumptions about heroism or greatness that circulate in our society.
- C. These visions of heroism are not necessarily wrong, just inadequate in themselves.
- D. First: Heroism in *physical strength and military power*.
 - 1. This idea is embodied in the warrior.
 - 2. Our admiration for strength is due in part to...
 - a. the fact that we are made in God’s likeness.
—The Lord God is a God of immense power.
 - b. The Bible also praises people of strength.
 - i. The men of valor who accompanied Joshua (Josh 1:14)
 - ii. Samson the judge (Jdg 13)
 - iii. King David praises God for training his hands to war and giving him strength to bend a bow of bronze (Ps 18:34).
 - c. The ideal of strength certainly has its place in God’s world.
 - 3. The problem arises when strength is admired only for its own sake.
 - a. God himself is never just a God of strength.
 - b. What makes God’s strength so *beautiful* is precisely that it is married to his holiness, truthfulness, love, and mercy.
 - c. Therefore, to have strength alone is not greatness.
 - d. There are many strong warriors who are also evil.
 - e. In order for strength to be truly heroic, it needs to be married to holiness, to goodness, and to compassion.
- E. Second: Heroism in *wisdom and knowledge*.
 - 1. This ideal is embodied in magi, sages, philosophers, scientists, and technocrats.

2. Once again, there is gem of the divine in this.
 - a. One of God’s attributes is wisdom and all-knowledge.
 - b. Jeremiah 51:15: “It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.”
 3. Like power, wisdom is not an end in itself.
 - a. There have been many intelligent people who have used their knowledge of the world for evil ends.
 - Scientists who experiment on unsuspecting people;
 - philosophers and theologians who twist the truth.
 - b. If wisdom is separated from God, or if it is prized merely for its own sake, then it ceases to be true wisdom. And it degenerates into evil.
- F. Third: Heroism in *strong and effective leadership*.
1. This ideal is embodied in legendary kings, presidents, generals, and ministers.
 2. We see in both Moses and Joshua this kind of heroism, the heroism of the great leader.
 3. Like the other visions of heroism before, the heroic leader also shows something of God.
 - God himself is the Leader of leaders, the great King who is the source of all rule and authority.
 4. But if strong leadership is separated from righteousness and compassion, it can degenerate into tyranny.
 - a. Many great tyrants in history were strong leaders of a sort (Hitler, Mussolini, Pol Pot, etc.).
 - b. They knew how to bestow a sense of greatness and purpose upon their own people—even if that greatness was delusional.
- G. There is more to heroism than just being a powerful warrior, a great sage, or a strong leader—all those traits could be possessed even by wicked people.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What are three ideals of heroism? (2) How does each ideal relate to God himself? (3) Why are each of these inadequate in themselves? (3) Can you think of people in your life who manifest the best and the worst aspects of each of these ideals?

VIII. Heroism That Matters Most

- A. If each of these visions of greatness are insufficient in themselves, what is the missing ingredient? What is the greatness or the heroism that God wants of his people?
- B. The heavenly Father tells us in his Word.
 - Leviticus 19:2: “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”
 - Matthew 5:48: “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

- 1 Timothy 6:11: “But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.”
—Those things are the heroism that God is seeking.
- C. Not all of us are called to be warriors, sages, or leaders.
—But all are called to heroic holiness.
- D. Like Joshua and Moses before him, the first and ultimate issue that God is concerned with is your obedience to him—your holiness, your righteousness, your devotion to him and from there, your love toward others.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the greatness to which God calls each of us? (2) How does this affect your ambitions in life at this point?

IX. Aspiring for Greater Obedience

- A. We should aspire toward greater obedience to God.
 1. We should not simply look to the world for its models of heroism.
 2. But we should look at the models the Scripture offers to us—saints like Moses, Joshua, and all the holy fathers and mothers, prophets and kings who were praised by our heavenly Father.
- B. To younger brothers and sisters.
 1. Be sure to choose your heroes wisely.
 2. If our heroes are known mainly for their *technique*, how strong or clever they are, we could end up being people of mere technique and external performance.
 3. We want to be known ultimately for our goodness and compassion, not simply our intelligence or skills.
- C. To older brothers and sisters.
 1. Some may be wondering about what we have made of life, the wisdom of our choices in education, career, and finances.
 2. Be careful that you not lose sight of the most important things.
—As long as you are pursuing obedience, does it really matter ultimately how well your choices in career turned out?
 3. God has not necessarily called us to be liked or glorified by the institutions we serve.
 4. God has called us first to holiness and obedience.
 5. We should find contentment in being *obedient* teachers, homemakers, technicians, etc.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) “We should not simply look to the world for its models of heroism.” How does this statement mean to you at this point in your life? (2) Who are the first line of heroes God wants us to emulate? (3) “God has not necessarily called us to be liked or glorified by the institutions we serve.” Discuss. (4) What does obedience to God look like in your present job?

X. Attaining Heroic Obedience

How do we attain fully this heroic obedience of which we speak? Surprisingly, it is not first by emulating Joshua. It is first by depending on

Jesus; by resting on who he is and what he has done for us. This is what separates Christianity from the other religions of the world. This is what separates the religion of the Gospel from the religion of human effort. Obedience is really a supernatural gift that comes from an external source—our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord himself taught this to us in John 15:5: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How do we actually attain the obedience God requires? (2) How does this set the religion of the Gospel apart from the religion of human effort? (3) Why do we need to stress that obedience is a gift that comes from a faith--filled relationship with Christ? What would happen if we do not do that? (4) Where do you need to trust in Christ for obedience today? In what areas of life do you struggle with sin and unbelief?