

# Sermon Outline

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

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## **THE IRRESISTIBLE PURPOSES OF GOD** (JOSHUA 11:16-20)

### I. Introduction

### II. Joshua Took All the Land (11:16, 17)

- A. From verses 16-22, we are given a summary of Israel’s victory over the entire land of Canaan.
- B. “So Joshua took all that land, the hill country and all the Negeb and all the land of Goshen and the lowland and the Arabah and the hill country of Israel and its lowland from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, as far as Baal-gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon” (vv 16, 17)
  - 1. This list covers Israel’s territory in the far south to the far north.
  - 2. The whole land of Canaan is now firmly under Israelite control.
- C. Joshua also “captured all their kings and struck them and put them to death...”

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What does the list of territories in verse 16 tell us about the extent of Israel’s control over the land? (2) What did Joshua do to all the enemy kings?

### III. Joshua’s Long War—and Ours (11:18)

- A. Verse 18 tells us that “Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.”
- B. We see something of a parallel to our own spiritual lives.
  - 1. The wars of conquest in Joshua are an analogy to the progressive sanctification in our Christian lives.
  - 2. Our Christian existence can be compared to the land of Canaan.
  - 3. Just as Joshua and the Israelites gradually brought the land under control, so our lives are only brought under the rule of Christ gradually.
  - 4. In some areas, we trust Christ confidently and submit readily.
  - 5. But in other areas, we still struggle to trust and obey.
  - 6. The rebellious parts of our personality and lives are like the enemy kings of the land.
  - 7. These enemy kings include:
    - Our undisciplined desire for *acceptance* by others—which leads to an unwillingness to admit wrongs
    - Our undisciplined desire for *security*—which spawns anxiety and fear
    - Our undisciplined desire for *relational satisfaction*—which leads to unreasonable demands on others

8. The Lord Jesus Christ wants to bring these rebellious desires under his sovereign rule—but he does so progressively.
- C. Since God has promised victory, victory will most assuredly come.
1. We have to be patient and not allow ourselves to be discouraged by the length of the sanctification/subduing process.
  2. We should also not be discouraged by the length of the sanctification process in others.
  3. Everyone in the Church is a work in progress.
  4. But if the Holy Spirit is working in your brother or sister, you can be sure that holiness will be achieved.
  5. Just as God continues to put up with enemy powers in the world, so we continue to put up with enemy powers in the hearts of one another.
  6. Heed the advice of Richard Sibbes: “Perfect refining is for another world, for the world of the souls of perfect men.” (*The Bruised Reed*, 25)

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Joshua’s long war with the enemy kings parallel our long war with indwelling sin? (2) How does the assurance of future victory over sin help us develop patience with ourselves and others?

#### IV. Israel Took On All the Nations (11:19)

- A. Aside from the Gibeonites, no city ever attempted to make peace with Israel (v 19)—and Israel “took them all in battle.”
- B. But why did none of the cities of Canaan make peace with Israel? —The explanation, according to verse 20, is that “it was the LORD’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle...”
- C. God hardened the hearts of his enemies “in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the LORD commanded Moses.”
- D. Of course, if the nations did repent, they would have been spared.
- E. But the point that this Scripture is making is that even repentance has been rendered impossible in the case of these nations. God has withdrawn himself from these civilizations. And without his grace, the people of the land would not be able to repent.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Why did no city ever make peace with Israel? (2) Why did God harden the hearts of the nations?

## V. God Is Sovereign Over Our Lives

- A. Again, we are confronted with a great fact that knits all reality together: *God is sovereign over the lives and destinies of all mankind.*
- Proverbs 21:1: “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.”
  - Romans 9:15: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”
- B. Perhaps another way that we can talk about this is to say that God’s rights are greater than human rights.
1. One of the possible reasons people have difficulty with believing in God’s sovereignty is because we value the rights of man.
  2. The notion that humans have rights is a biblical one.  
—“A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge” (Prov 2:7)
  3. But since we are sinful, even good things, even the blessings of God, become twisted in our hands.
  4. People have the impression that they are the center of their own universes, that they are the ultimate determiners of their own lives.
  5. Against a twisted vision of human rights as well as a over-exalted view of human authority, we must assert what the Scripture says—because God is our Creator and the rightful Landlord over every nation, God has the right to do with our lives whatever he wishes.
- C. It is also good to read this passage in light of past history.
1. Consider the following:
    - Deuteronomy 2:30: “But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as he is this day.”
    - Exodus 10:20: “But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go.”
  2. Based on those instances in past history, we see that God hardens the hearts of his enemies so that he might have an occasion to punish them, and so that his people might gain victory over their enemies.
  3. So what we are seeing in Joshua 11 is not new.  
—God is simply doing to his enemies what he had done before: He hardens their hearts; causes them to be unwilling to repent; and then from there, destroys them for their sins.
- D. God hardens the hearts of his enemies is not by creating new evil in them, but simply by allowing them to go on their way.
1. We know that God does not create evil in the hearts of people because God is good and does not tempt anyone to sin.  
—James 1:13: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.”

2. Instead, God hardens the hearts of his enemies by simply allowing them to harden their own hearts, by simply allowing them to go the whole way in their sins
3. We see this in the case of Pharaoh.
  - a. Scripture tells us that God hardened his heart (Ex 4:21, 7:3).
  - b. But Scripture also says Pharaoh hardened his own heart.
 

—Exodus 8:32: “But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.”

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) “God is sovereign over the lives and destinies of all mankind.” Discuss. (2) How does God harden the hearts of his enemies? Does he create new evil in them—or simply allow them to go their own way?

## VI. Keep Our Hearts Tender

- A. Since God does harden the hearts of his enemies, this truth ought to remind us that we should always endeavor to keep our hearts tender before God and open to his promises and commands.
- B. This does not mean...
  1. spending most of our time analyzing again and again our thoughts or motivations.
 

—Not a healthy step, especially for those who are prone to melancholy.
  2. focusing more on our sincerity than on Christ.
    - a. There will always be weaknesses in our sincerity.
    - b. There is no place in our lives where we have attained perfect righteousness.
- C. A tender heart is one that keeps trusting alone in the Lord Jesus for salvation and from there, seeking to obey him out of love and thankfulness.
  1. We’re not saved by our obedience; yet, we are saved to obey.
  2. We should expect to see obedience in our lives—not *perfect* obedience, but obedience.
  3. To help us keep our hearts tender before God, ask ourselves these questions.
    - When was the last time we refrained from something because we love Jesus?
    - When was the last time you did something because you loved Jesus?
  4. As we strive to refrain from sin and do good out of love for our Lord, these are good signs that we have a living faith and the Holy Spirit rules in us.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) God hardens the hearts of his enemies. What should this spur us to do? (2) How do we keep our hearts tender before God?

## VII. The Irresistible Purposes of God for Our Good

*God is devoted to the absolute good of his children.* That absolute good is the Kingdom of God. It is the whole universe united as one under the lordship of Jesus Christ (Eph 1:22). On the one hand, this means the destruction of every enemy of God and his children. On the other hand, it is the total conformity of our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, the final removal of every sin in our hearts. The good news is that God is more committed to this goal than even we are. Yet, the implication is not that we can sit back and do nothing. Just as God called the Israelites to subdue the land while trusting on his promises, God calls us to subdue ourselves while resting in his Gospel. So we trust and obey. We obey not because the fate of the whole world is on our shoulders. We obey because the Kingdom has already been promised us through our Lord Jesus. And those who have this hope purify themselves as God himself is pure (1 Jn 3:3).

- A. How do we purify ourselves and defeat our interior “enemy kings”?
- B. Some of the enemy kings are simply undisciplined/undisciplined desires.
  - 1. Discipline your undisciplined desire for *acceptance* by trusting that God has accepted you and loves you in Christ (Rom 8:39).
  - 2. Discipline your undisciplined desire for *security* by believing that God and Christ have promised not to leave you (Mt 28:20).
  - 3. Discipline your undisciplined desire for *relational satisfaction* by accepting that God is your Abba Father (Gal 4:6)—and keep practicing that truth by going to God in prayer!
- C. Many of the enemy kings are simply evil. They cannot be converted and must be destroyed.
  - 1. They are the sinful practices we rely on to protect ourselves.
  - 2. Ephesians 4:25-31 lists some of them.
    - Lying
    - Unrestrained anger
    - Theft
    - Corrupting talk
    - Malice
  - 3. These practices must be renounced and repented of.
  - 4. They must be replaced by the righteous behaviors associated with the likeness of God (Eph 4:25-32).
    - We replace lying with truthful speech.
    - We replace sinful anger with forgiveness (Eph 4:32).
    - We replace theft with diligence that renders “service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man” (Eph 6:7).
    - We replace corrupting talk with encouraging, upbuilding speech.
    - We replace malice with kindness.

5. The strength and wisdom to dethrone these kings comes from the fact that we have “learned Christ” (Eph 4:20), that we already have him as our Lord.
- D. Since (1) we have learned Christ and (2) God has already purposed to give us the kingdom, let us purify the realms of our lives.  
—Let us replace our sins and weaknesses with the rule of God!

“Beloved, we are God’s children now,  
and what we will be has not yet appeared;  
but we know that when he appears we shall be like him,  
because we shall see him as he is.  
And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”  
(1 Jn 3:2, 3)

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How do we discipline each of the undisciplined desires of our hearts? (2) What is the alternative to each of the sinful behaviors we have? (3) What gives us the strength and the motivation to reform our lives? (4) What are some enemy kings that currently seem to have power over your life?