

Sermon Outline

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

HOMECOMING

JOSHUA 22:1-9

I. Introduction

II. Joshua Commends the Eastern Tribes (Joshua 22:1-4)

- A. In chapter 22, we see that Joshua summons the eastern tribes to himself. He has some final words for them.

- B. Joshua is commending and encouraging the tribes. There are at least four things for which Joshua commends the tribes.
 - 1. “You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you...” (v 2)
 - 2. “...and have obeyed my voice in all that I have commanded you” (v 2)
 - 3. “You have not forsaken your brothers these many days...” (v 3)
 - 4. “...but have been careful to keep the charge of the LORD your God” (v 3)

- C. These commendations tell us is what constituted—and what continues to constitute—conduct that is *praiseworthy* before the Lord.
—The conduct that pleases the Lord is loving and zealous obedience to his commandments as given through his appointed prophet leaders.

- D. In our day, the prophet leader of the Church is none other than the Son of God himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 1. Hebrews 1:1-2: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son*, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”
 - 2. The role of the great prophet leader of the Church is now filled by the Son of God himself.
 - 3. Jesus is the One who addresses the Church today on behalf of God the Father.
 - 4. He does so through the Holy Spirit, who, in turn, speaks through the sacred Scriptures.
 - 5. While God continues to bestow teachers upon the Church in the form of pastors, elders, and members who are gifted in teaching the Scriptures, these people are not on the same level as the great prophet leaders of the Church.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Joshua commend the tribes? (2) According to Heb 1:1-2, who is the Church's great Prophet Leader today?

III. Joshua Allows the Eastern Tribes to Go Home (Joshua 22:4)

- A. Having praised them for their good work, Joshua now allows them to return to their homes: "Therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan."

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does Joshua do to after he praises the work of these tribes?

IV. Joshua Exhorts the Tribes to Keep the Law (Joshua 22:5, 6)

- A. Joshua exhorts the tribes to keep on doing what they had been doing. Just as they obeyed God in wartime, they should also obey God in peacetime.
- B. As sinful people, we tend to be humble before God when we are in danger, and less reverent toward him when life is smooth-sailing.
- C. Just as Joshua felt it necessary to praise the soldiers, he also sees the need to give them this exhortation: "Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you..."
- D. What is the essence of the commandments of the Law? It is...
1. "to love the LORD your God..."
 2. "...and to walk in all his ways..."
 3. "...and to keep his commandments..."
 4. "...and to cling to him..."
 5. "...to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul."
- E. The language that we find here is very intense, intimate, and even emotive. —Joshua is pleading with them to live in total communion with God.
- F. The label that we can give to this way of life is *holiness*.
1. Holiness is saying no to sin that we might say yes to God.
 2. Holiness is an orientation of one's entire way of life toward God, the Source of life.
 3. In striving for holiness, we are seeking to unite our entire lives—our values, our thoughts, our daily work, our favourite pastimes, even our sexuality—around the holy, loving of God.
 4. Holiness is not as trivial as avoiding some socially-unacceptable things or upholding the good moral values of a certain society.

5. Holiness is the state of being absolutely possessed by God himself.
 6. That is what God wants of us. By his grace, that is what God will have.
- G. Even though the wars are over, the need to obey God's Law remains, because the need to love God will never disappear.
- H. In fact, God saves us from our enemies that we might obey him. Zechariah's hymn is instructive on this point.
- “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
71 that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. (Lk 1:68-75)*
- I. It is also worth pointing out that the commandments and the laws that God gave to Israel are to be not only the code of conduct of a few good men; but they are to be the underlying value system of God's people.
1. Israel was meant to be God's light in the world.
 2. By forming a society that cherishes the Word of God, Israel will show the world what it means to be truly human.
 3. To be truly human is to be a child of God.
 4. From there, it is to listen to the voice of our heavenly Father and do his will. As we do his will, we become more and more like God.
- J. With that closing exhortation, we read that “Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does Joshua exhort the tribes to do? (2) What is holiness? (3) Based on Zechariah's hymn (vv 74, 75), what is the purpose of God's salvation?

V. The Possessions of the Eastern Tribes (Joshua 22:7, 8)

- A. In the remainder of this section, Joshua gives specific instructions to the people concerning the portioning of their inheritances, specifically the inheritances of Manasseh.

- B. The Scripture reads: “Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the other half Joshua had given a possession beside their brothers in the land west of the Jordan.”
- C. “Joshua sent them away to their homes and blessed them...”
- D. He also says to them, “Go back to your tents with much wealth and with very much livestock, with silver, gold, bronze, and iron, and with much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers” (vv 7-8).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does Joshua instruct the tribes to do when they go back to their homes?

VI. Homecoming (Joshua 22:9)

- A. The eastern tribes respond with obedience: “So the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned home, parting from the people of Israel at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, their own land of which they had possessed themselves by command of the LORD through Moses.”
- B. This was probably an emotional moment.
 1. These brother soldiers had fought alongside one another, sweated and bled with one another on the field of battle.
 2. Now, the time had come for them to go their separate ways. This is a tearful moment.
 3. Dr. James Boice encourages us to “try to feel the tremendous emotion involved in the parting of these comrades in arms.”
 4. Yes, the sacred Text does not speak of these emotions. But, as Boice says, “we must remember that these men had fought side by side in a conquest that lasted longer than either of our world wars” (Boice, *Joshua*, 117).
- C. To think that the soldiers could just go their separate ways without feeling a sense of sadness is not to read the text in a humane way.
—As soldiers of any generation can tell you, the heat of war forms certain emotional ties amongst brothers-in-arms that are very hard to break.
- D. But as wonderful as such ties are, the parting still needs to happen because these men have families to return to. We are not meant to live lives in constant conflict. We are all meant to return to our homes, to our spouses and children, to our ordinary work. Home is still where the heart is ultimately.
- E. But the reality that is even more basic than our own households is God himself.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How did the tribes respond to Joshua? (2) Why was this homegoing or parting probably an emotional moment? (3) Do you see returning to your home and family as an important part of your life?

VII. Finding our Home in the Lord

God himself is really our ultimate home. Since God and his Word remain the stable unchanging realities of our lives, you and I must find our final resting place in God.

- A. Just as Israel obeyed God when times were tough, Israel is also to obey God when times are well. Obedience to God is the unchanging reality in all the seasons of our lives.
- B. Even when this world comes to an end and our struggle with sin is finally over, love for God will remain.
- C. The prophet Joshua's exhortation continues to be relevant to us.
 1. In all things and at all times, we must make God our priority and the blazing center of our lives.
 2. We must be firmly and fully attached to our loving heavenly Father, drawing from him all that we need for life, and returning all that we are to him in acts of holy love.
 3. This means observing his commandments, loving him, walking in all his ways, keeping his commandments, clinging to him the way a child clings to his beloved father (or the way a bride clings to her husband), and serving his interests in the world.
- D. If this is indeed the case, if this is where the universe is heading, how should it affect the way that we approach life? It certainly gives us new questions to direct our living.
 - Do we see that loving God is really the most important vocation of our lives?
 - Parents, when was the last time you actually encouraged your child to love the Lord and devote his or her life to his Kingdom? Does your child get the sense that you are more concerned for his or her devotion to God than to how successful he or she becomes?
 - Children, when was the last time you thought about what pleases God? When was the last time you asked God to show you your sins, forgive your sins, and help you to love him more?
 - For all of us, how often do we see ourselves first as servants of God before we see ourselves as employees of whatever company we work for?

- E. The call of this Scripture, and indeed, of all Scripture, is to make communion with God the organizing principle in life—and make everything else serve that principle.
- F. The good news is that what God wants, God will get.
1. God has not left it all up to us to achieve this by ourselves.
 2. Ultimately, salvation and sanctification are the work of God in Jesus Christ.
 3. In Ephesians 1:7, Paul says that it is in Christ that “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace...”
 4. Then in verses 9 and 10, Paul reveals that the great purpose of God was actually “set forth *in Christ* as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things *in him*, things in heaven and things on earth.”
 - a. Christ Jesus is where all things come together. Christ Jesus represents in himself the completion of all things. Christ Jesus is the nucleus and center of the new holy reality that God is bringing about.
 - b. All throughout his life, the Lord Jesus Christ was establishing this new reality.
 - c. At his baptism and all throughout his obedient life, Christ was answering the call of God, devoting himself to fulfilling Israel’s role as God’s filial Son in the world, and fulfilling all the righteousness that God requires of his people (cf. Mt 3:15; Rom 5:19).
 - d. At his death, Christ absorbed the curse of the Law and exhausted it once and for all for us who believe (cf. Gal 3:13).
 - e. At his resurrection, Christ was receiving God’s declaration of righteousness over himself as well as for all those whom he represents (cf. Rom 4:25).
 - f. At his ascension, Christ entered into his final glory to prepare a home for us (Jn 14:3)—a home where we will love and obey and serve our heavenly Father all the days of our eternal lives.
- G. If Joshua 22 shows us the plan of God, then Christ is where that plan is fulfilled. If Joshua 22 gives us the call of God, then Christ is where you and I give God our answer. With our hope in Christ alone, let us serve the glory of our heavenly Father.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Obedience to God and communion with God are the unchanging realities of life. How should this shape our perspective of life? (2) How do we answer those questions in under (D)? (3) In Eph 1:9-10, Paul reveals that the great purpose of God was actually “set forth *in Christ* as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things *in him*, things in heaven and things on earth.” How is Christ the center and basis of the fulfilment of God’s will for our lives?