

# Sermon Outline

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

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## **BE VERY STRONG** *JOSHUA 23:1-16*

### **I. The Call for Strong Christians**

### **II. Introduction to a Prophet’s Last Words (Josh 23:1)**

- A. When Joshua 23 begins, we are told that a long time had already passed since the events concerning the altar.
- B. Then we see two details about the time in which Joshua 23 speaks.
  - 1. “the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies”
  - 2. “Joshua was old and well advanced in years [.]”
- C. It was during this time, knowing that his days are coming to an end, that the old prophet and leader Joshua the Son of Nun summons all his leaders to give them a final message which takes up the majority of chapter 23.
- D. If there is one key ethical principle that the book of Joshua teaches, what is that principle? Well, we will find it here in Joshua’s statement to his leaders. Basically, this principle is summarized in the words: “Be very strong.” More specifically, it’s “be very strong to love the Lord and keep all of his holy commandments.”

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) When does Joshua deliver this address recorded in Joshua 23? (2) What is the central law/ethical principle that Joshua offers us?

### **III. Reflections on the Past, Promises for the Future (Joshua 23:3-5)**

- A. When Joshua gathers his leaders around him, he begins by stating, “I am now old and well advanced in years” (v 2).
  - 1. He is implying, that his days are about to come to an end.
  - 2. Joshua does not want future generations of Israelites to forget what the Lord had done for them
- B. Next, he appeals to the experience of the leaders: “And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you.”
  - 1. This is a reminder that God works in history.

2. Joshua makes his appeal based on what the Lord had done for Israel, and what he continues to do for Israel.
  3. While we should love God for the sake of God, regardless of whether or not he blesses us, Joshua—and the Scriptures as a whole—urge us to love God as a response to his salvation.
  4. The basis of Israel’s obedience is on the work of God on their behalf—and this logic continues today in the Church.
- C. Joshua then reaffirms...
1. What Joshua himself had done for Israel during his term as a leader: “Behold, *I* have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that *I* have already cut off...” (v 4)
  2. What the Lord will continue to do for Israel long after he himself is gone: “The LORD your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight...” (v 5).
  3. As a result, “you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you.”

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What is implied in Joshua’s words: “I am now old and well advanced in years” (v 2)? (2) According to Joshua, who has fought for Israel?

#### IV. “Therefore, Be Very Strong” (Joshua 23:6)

- A. In view of that promise—the promise of God’s help—Joshua now comes to the main exhortation that he wants his people to hear.
- B. This exhortation is familiar, because it was the same exhortation Joshua himself received when he was just starting out as a much younger leader (cf. 1:6, 7, 9, 18).
- C. But now, we find him giving it to this new generation of leaders before him. Look now at verse 6: “Therefore”—in light of all that the Lord God has done and will do for you—“be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left [.]”
  1. That was what this sage leader wants his successors and their children to do.
  2. Joshua was not first and foremost a military soldier. He was first and foremost a servant of God.
- D. But then in verses 7-8, Joshua explains why Israel should be very strong to keep the Law of the Lord.

1. Negatively: It's so "that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them..."
2. Positively: "but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day."

E. Joshua goes on to remind the leaders yet again of why it is that they *can* cling to the Lord: "For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, just as he promised you" (vv 9-10).

1. It is *not* in vain that Israel clings to the Lord.
2. Instead, the Lord is the divine King who has come to Israel's aid time and time again, because he has set his love on Israel.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What is Joshua's exhortation to the people? (2) What are the reasons Joshua gives in vv 7-9 to stir Israel to obedience? How do these reasons apply to us today?

## V. Motivators for Obedience (Joshua 23:7-10)

A. In verses 7-10, Joshua presents two reasons for why Israel should be very strong to keep the Law of the Lord. These are two motivators for obedience even for the Church today.

B. The first motivator is *negative*: It's so "that you may *not* mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them..."

C. The second motivator is *positive*: "but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day" (v 8).

1. We also keep God's commandments to cling to the Lord himself.
2. Since God's commandments represent God's person, the way we love God is by cherishing his Law and obeying it.

D. Joshua reminds his leaders of why they *can* cling to the Lord. He appeals yet again to what the Lord has done and will do for Israel (vv 9-10).

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What reasons does Joshua give to stir Israel to be faithful to keep the commandments? (vv 7-10) (2) Why is intermarriage so dangerous for Israel? And why is it not good for single Christians to pursue marriage with unbelievers? (3) How is the Church's relationship to God like marriage?

## VI. “Be Very Careful, Therefore” (Joshua 23:11)

- A. Joshua exhorts the leaders yet again in verse 11: “*Be very careful*, therefore, to love the LORD your God.”
- B. This is essentially the same exhortation as the one in verse 6: “Therefore, *be very strong* to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses...”  
—The reason we say it’s essentially the same exhortation—or at least the same kind of exhortation—is because to love the Lord is to do his Law.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How does the original exhortation rephrased in verse 11? (2) Why is loving the Lord so closely tied to keeping his commandments?

## VII. A Warning (Joshua 23:12-13)

- A. But what would happen if Israel doesn’t love the Lord and keep his commandments? What would happen if Israel treats the Lord’s kindness with scorn? They can expect punishment.
- B. Joshua warns, “For if you turn back and *cling* to the remnant of these nations remaining among you...”
- C. How would Israel actually cling to these nations? Joshua explains, by making “*marriages* with them, so that you *associate* with them and they with you...”
- D. If Israel should do such things, then “know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you...”
- E. The language of “clinging” is also worth considering.
  - 1. The verb “cling” in verse 12 is the one used in verse 8, “you shall *cling* to the LORD your God...”
  - 2. It is also the same verb used in Genesis 2:24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and *hold fast* to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”
  - 3. This suggests two things.
    - a. Israel’s relationship to God is akin to marriage (because the word “cling” is used to describe marriage in verse 12).
    - b. Marriage with unbelievers is a form of idolatry (because it’s a turning away from the Lord).
  - 4. Thus, *idolatry* and *intermarriage* are very closely intertwined.
    - a. Intermarriage is idolatry because it places the individual’s desires above God’s preferences.
    - b. Intermarriage will most likely lead to idolatry in the fullest sense—the worship of false gods, possibly even demonic beings.

- F. The consequences of intermarriage and idolatry would be the removal of God's protection. The remaining nations "shall be a snare and a trap for you..."

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What are the consequences of idolatry and intermarriage? (2) What is the significance of the term "cling"? (3) Why is intermarriage idolatrous?

### VIII. The Certainty of the Lord's Judgment (Joshua 23:14-16)

- A. In verse 14, Joshua announces that he is about to die: "And now I am about to go the way of all the earth..."  
—This serves to emphasize the urgency of his message.
- B. Joshua appeals to the leaders' own experience of God's faithfulness: "and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed."
- C. But there is another side to the faithfulness of God.
1. If God is indeed faithful to bless his people for their faithfulness, God will also be faithful to punish his people *if* they betray him (vv 15-16).
  2. "Evil things" (or unfortunate things) refers to the curses uttered in Deuteronomy 28.
- D. So Joshua is being very serious about this. He knows the challenges his people will face. He has lived through the times when the Lord had punished his people. And so, he is now desperate to make sure that Israel doesn't repeat the same mistakes that they had made in the past.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How is God faithful also in terms of his curses and judgments? (2) What are the bad things that God would bring on Israel if they are unfaithful to him? (Read Dt 28:15-68 for a fuller answer.)

### IX. Freedom from the Curse

- A. If we are believers in Christ, we live on the other side of the curse.
1. The curse of the Law fell on Israel during the exile.
  2. The curse in its fullest form fell on the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Gal 3:13)—  
God himself has exhausted the curse of his own Law.
  3. By dying on the cross for our sins, the Lord Jesus...
    - a. took all our punishments for breaking the Law.
    - b. fulfilled all obedience to God on our behalf, so as to reconcile us to the heavenly Father (Phil 2:8).

- B. There is no more condemnation for those in Christ (Rom 8:1).
- C. It is precisely that we are reconciled to God that we can now rise to the challenge of his call.
1. Ephesians 5:1-2: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”
  2. Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”
- D. We will also begin to live according to God’s Law: “So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” (Rom 8:12-14).
- Our love for God’s Law, imperfect as it may be, is a sign of God’s life in us.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What is our relationship to the Law as believers in Christ? How does Christ free us from the Law and yet restore us to the Law?

## **X. Strong through Our Life-Giving Christ**

**Because of all that God has done for us all through the ages, whether through Moses, Joshua, or David, but especially through our Lord Jesus, let us be very strong in our love for the Lord. Let us be very focused on his commandments. And let us cling to him with our whole lives. This is the essence of what God has called us to be. This is where our central vocation as human beings lies.**