

Not
one
Failed
Promise.

Life Group Study Series

Joshua: Week Twelve

24th April 2017

Bible

Joshua 23:1-16 (NIV)

Joshua's Farewell to the Leaders

1 After a long time had passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, **2** summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them: “I am very old. **3** You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you. **4** Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. **5** The Lord your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

6 “Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of

Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. **7** Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. **8** But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now.

9 “The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you.

10 One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. **11** So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

12 “But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, **13** then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips

on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you.

14 “Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. 15 But just as all the good things the Lord your God has promised

you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the Lord your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. 16 If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord’s anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you.”

Sermon Summary

As we near the end of the book of Joshua the narrator lays the foundation for the ongoing story of Israel as told in the book of Judges. Here, in chapter 23, Joshua gives his farewell address to the nation and identifies two challenges that Israel will face moving forward. These two challenges are: a) to avoid the temptation of following the gods of the nations among whom they live (until the Lord drives them out) and, b) there is no succession plan after Joshua. These challenges will provide the crucible in which Israel will prove how well they have learned the lessons of faith, trust and obedience. And there is some reason to be optimistic since the book of Joshua has presented Israel as immediately obedient to the commands of the Lord and, apart from Achan’s sin, there is little to complain about. How will they fare without a national leader in times of peace?

In Joshua’s speech he identifies four things that Israel should do in order to remain faithful and these are as applicable today as they were then.

First, Joshua urges Israel to remember what the Lord has done on their behalf. When doubts come (as they do), recalling the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord in the past will sustain them into the future. As believers, we do this as we gather for worship and it is an important discipline to commit to, in order that we too might recall what God has done for us.

Second, Joshua encourages them to be careful to keep the Law of Moses. The Law outlined what a relationship with the Lord looked like and, to receive the blessing of living in relationship with the Lord, it was critical that they kept the Law close to their hearts. The same is true for us (and this is a corporate task) and is a key reason why we continue to make the reading and teaching of the Word of God central to what we do together. While it is important to read the Bible on our own, but also to talk about it together.

Third, Joshua reminds the Israelites of the importance of remaining distinct from the nations among whom they live. They are not to call upon the gods of these nations or intermarry with them (for reasons of faithfulness rather than ethnic purity). This reminds us of the reason why the Lord has settled them in the land; to be a witness to the nations of what it looks like to live in relationship with him. The plan was that there might be more like Rahab and the Gibeonites – those who might turn to the Lord and be incorporated into the people of God. We will only be able to consider our engagement in our world if

we have a clear understanding of the character of the Lord as revealed in his Word. For we too are meant to be a light to the nations!

Finally, Joshua warns the people about the cost of failure. To fail to be faithful will result in their destruction and perishing from the land. The stakes are high! Not only will they perish, but the plan of God for a royal priesthood and holy nation will be impeded and the nations will not see relationship with the Lord lived out. We too must keep the consequences of our failure in mind. Now, the Lord will accomplish his plans and purposes, that is certain, but it appears that the Lord invites us into genuine partnership with him and that our failure has real consequences.

The question for Israel is whether they are ready for the challenges they are about to face. And we can ask ourselves if we are ready as well. Are we learning the lessons of faith, trust and obedience so that, when the challenges come, we are prepared? This is the question that Joshua 23 urges us to ask.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a LifeGroup discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Think of a time when you faced a challenge that tested how well you had learned certain lessons (e.g., taking up a new role at work, becoming a parent, an apprenticeship). What did that challenge reveal about what you had learned? Share your thoughts with the group.
2. Take some time to read Joshua chapter 23. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that 'jump out at you'. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain why it jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word or phrase. Take some time to share what you've been lead to.
3. Joshua urges Israel to learn the lessons of faith, trust and obedience in four ways. Remember the Law (v6), remain distinct from the other nations (v7), hold fast to God (v8), and remember the consequences of not following God (vs15,16). Discuss what these four lessons mean, and why they were important for Israel to learn.
4. What are the consequences for our world, when *our community* of faith is **weak** in each of these four areas? (You might want to think both locally and globally about your answers.)
5. What is the impact on our world, when *our community* of faith is **strong** in each of these four areas? (You might want to think both locally and globally about your answers.)
6. What are the challenges that you face in life that would be positively affected by growing strong in one or more of these four lessons of faith?

Prayer

Take some time to reflect on your answers to question 6, pray for each other that you might be strengthened by the power of God's Holy Spirit in each of these four lessons of faith, particularly as you face the challenges you've mentioned.