**Pass the Baton**

**Joshua 23 (ESV)**

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We’ve been studying Joshua and we continue that study today, this morning. We’re in Joshua 23, so we’re coming to the end of this great book of history that describes how God presented to His people an inheritance of a land, forming them as a nation to be used, who ultimately would bring blessing to all the nations through the birth of the Messiah. Joshua’s name means “Yahweh saves.” In the New Testament, the equivalent of the name “Joshua” is Jesus. Again, this is the beginnings of God’s message of telling us that He is the Lord who saves. He is the one who fights for His people against sin and against death. And that’s a message that Joshua brings today in Joshua 23.

Joshua is an old man, now. He’s over 100 years old. He gathers the leaders of Israel around because it’s time for them to take over the leadership of the nation. He’s very concerned about the future, as any godly person is, knowing that the battle ahead of us is still very hard and there are so many dangers, so many pitfalls. So now he is going to give some counsel to these leaders that are now going to take over from him. I’m just going to read the first eleven verses as we look at Joshua 23 together.

***1*** *A long time afterward, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years,* ***2*** *Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, “I am old now and well advanced in years.* ***3*** *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.* ***4*** *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, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west.* ***5*** *The LORD your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you.* ***6*** *Therefore, 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,* ***7*** *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,* ***8*** *but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day.* ***9*** *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.* ***10*** *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.* ***11*** *Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God.*

What a great passage of Scripture!

When I was in grade school I ran on a 4 x 400 relay team. I think I was the third leg of that because the third leg is typically the one that is not the fastest on the team. In this race, each runner carries a baton for one full lap around the track and then they pass that baton on to the next runner. The pass of the baton is a practiced skill. It’s the one thing that our team did together during practice, other than just simply run. The runner that is finishing a lap is going to pass the baton as the next runner is accelerating. Hopefully it’s just that perfect timing where as that runner is decelerating, the other runner is accelerating at the same speed and there’s a perfect pass of the baton.

Now I have to tell you, that didn’t always take place. Oftentimes we sort of fumbled that transition and it cost us seconds off of our time. It cost us positions in the race. There was once we dropped the baton and we were disqualified from the race altogether. It looks like such a simple thing when you’re just watching a race and watching one runner pass a little stick to another runner. It looks like this is the simplest thing in the world, but that passing of the baton can so quickly go wrong and lead to disaster for the team.

You remember at the burning bush, God calls Moses to run the first leg of this race to bring Israel out of Egypt. Moses runs this race for forty years. All through the desert, the baton is in his hand, the baton of leadership. Then just east of the Jordan River, God tells him, “Moses, you’re not going to be able to enter into the land. You disobeyed me when you struck the rock, and I’m not going to let you cross. I’ll let you look into it, but you have to pass the baton to Joshua.” So Moses passes the baton to Joshua. Joshua grabs that baton of leadership and he leads the Israelites into the Promised Land to dwell in it.

So we come to Joshua 23 and Joshua is an old man now. He is over 100 years old. He has served God faithfully for decades of time. He is at the end of his leg of this race and he knows it. It’s time for him to pass on this baton of leadership to others. That’s what Joshua 23 is all about. It’s Joshua taking a personal moment with these leaders and saying, “Okay. It is your turn to lead and I want to give you some instructions.” Because it’s so easy to drop the baton. And if you drop the baton, the race is over for everyone.

***1*** *A long time afterward, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years,* ***2*** *Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, “I am old now and well advanced in years.*

Joshua 23 begins with a time marker.

***1*** *A long time afterward,*

It’s probably referencing the afterward of Israel’s first entrance into the Promised Land. It’s that time when they crossed the river on dry ground and then they marched around Jericho for seven days. So it’s been a long time after the initial entrance into the land that God promised as an inheritance. Joshua 24 tells us that Joshua is going to die at 110 years old. So likely, the Israelites have been in the land now for twenty to thirty years. So that’s a long time after; twenty or thirty years after.

Now during that time, God had given incredible victories and many wonders had been done as God fights for the Israelites. The Lord had given rest to Israel. Joshua knows that though there have been a lot of battles that have been fought and won and are over, there are many, many battles yet ahead. Isn’t that always true? Regardless of what transition of leadership, we can look back at some battles that we’ve won, but the battle is never over; not until Jesus returns. It’s not over until Jesus takes His rightful place upon the throne, when all the enemies of Christ are set aside.

Friends, fighting never stops in this world of sin! If we stop fighting, that means we begin losing because the fight is always, always present. Let me ask you as you think about your own lives, what battles lie ahead of you? The truth is, not one of us knows. We know that there are battles. We know that they are significant. We know they are serious. We know they are strong. But you and I can’t imagine the battles that lie ahead of us. We don’t know what battle lies ahead of us tomorrow or next week or next month or next year. We just know that they’re going to be there. Satan, God’s enemy, is active to destroy our soul and to destroy Jesus’ church. That’s what we know. So it’s in this view of understanding the fierceness of the battle that Joshua is going to give the leaders of Israel a personal message.

These are guys who are full of faith. They’ve seen God work. They’ve followed the Lord as they’ve followed Joshua’s leadership. Yet, it’s possible for them to stumble. You see, watching a faithful leader is much different from being a faithful leader. They had seen Joshua up close, but they needed more than just an example. They needed to attach to their calling, to the stewardship by faith in a very significant way. If God has called you into a place of spiritual leadership, whether it’s in the home, whether it’s in a Sunday School class, whether it’s in a church at large or other ministry, it’s vital that you take a moment in your soul to say, “By faith, I’m going to grab hold of the stewardship that God has granted to me.”

So Joshua coaches these leaders who are going to run the rest of the way forward. God records Joshua’s sermon not only for the leaders of that day, but also for us. God gives us and the spiritual leaders in our day, three specific lessons or callings, directives that help us to run the race and to win the race. We have a leg. We have a beginning of that leg of the race, we have a middle, and there is going to be an end. There is going to be a time when we’re going to depart. The question is what kind of race will we have run? Joshua’s words are so practical.

Joshua is a warrior for God who has lived a long and faithful life.Joshua is not some ivory tower academician. He’s not saying, “Let me write a book on leadership,” and then uses flowery, philosophical language. No, he’s a guy who has led every day in a very practical, concrete, feet-on-the-ground way. So he gives us some really practical, simple words, directives. There are three of them, if you’re taking notes, that you might observe.

**Directive #1: Remember God’s Works**

If you’re in a place of spiritual leadership, the first thing to do is look back on what God has done. Remember! Don’t forget! Hold onto those things. Joshua says to these leaders,

***3*** *And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake,*

He says, “I want you to reflect on the last twenty years or more. You’ve seen it. Haven’t you seen how God has worked miracles in your midst?” He’s says it’s important for you to think about that because

*for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you.*

Spiritual leaders never win the battles. Spiritual leaders just simply connect to God, who wins the battle. Joshua is not taking credit. He’s not saying, “I have served you well. Look at how I’ve led us to so many victories.” No, he knows he did not lead this nation to victory. It was the Lord who led this nation to victory. There is no other explanation for the victories that this nation has received other than the Lord. The LORD Himself has fought for you!

***4*** *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, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west.*

That’s what God did.

***5*** *The LORD your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight.*

When you think about what God has done in the past, you’re confident that He’s going to continue to do what He promises.

*And you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you.*

Joshua is saying to these leaders, “Take a moment to stop and think about God’s goodness. Think about His power that has been at work.”

So often in Scripture God calls us to remember. We’ve noticed this theme in Joshua already. We’ve noticed how God established a yearly Passover feast to remember how God protected His people when the destroying angel passed over Egypt and every house that had blood painted on its doorposts, that Destroyer didn’t touch them. Do you remember that? He says, “That was God protecting us.” He says, “Remember how God then also opened up the flooded Jordan River so you could cross over on dry ground.” He even said in Joshua 4, if you remember that message, “I want you to take twelve stones from the middle of the river and take them back to Shiloh, where the tabernacle is going to be.”

**Joshua 4:7** So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever.”

Then you remember how Achan disobeyed God. Achan, after he disobeyed God, God took his life and they piled up a big pile of stones over Achan as a memorial of God’s righteous indignation against rebellion, against sin. We see then also in Joshua 8 and Joshua 10 where there were enemy kings. After the kings were killed in judgment by God, big stones were placed over their graves. Joshua makes a point in this letter and says that these stones remain there to this day. In other words, they were stones that when people walked past them, they could remember that’s the time when God caused hailstones to fall out of the sky to defeat the enemy. That’s the time when He caused the sun to stand still. That’s what God does in order to protect His people, provide for His people, and to put an end to His enemies. That’s what God does. They’re memorial stones. We’re going to see this again next week in Joshua 24, where God is going to tell them to take a large stone and set it up by the sanctuary of the LORD. Joshua is going to say,

**Joshua 24:27** “Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us,

In other words, it’s a memorial stone. So all through this book, we see these memorials. Why do we need to remember? What’s so important about taking some time to remember God and His working? Well first, I think we make the same mistakes today that we made yesterday, if we don’t remember. We forget that God’s path always leads to peace and joy and blessing. Satan is constantly working to convince us that disobedience leads to blessing. By remembering, we remember the consistency of God in bringing blessing to a people who submit to Him.

Also, if we fail to remember, we get discouraged about the present distresses. We forget that God is actually fighting for us. Twice in this chapter, he says God is fighting for you. You see, Satan works to discourage us, doesn’t he? Especially leaders! He works to discourage us in the present by causing us to forget the past victories that God has provided. When we forget God and His past workings, we take our eyes off of God. We take our eyes off of eternity. We forget how much God loves us and that He really is for us. Satan works to convince us that the temporary is really more significant than the eternal. It’s remembering what God has done in the past that reminds us and clicks us out of this temporal world that we live in, and we see that what really is significant is what is forever and ever, what’s ahead of us. When we forget, we also lose a heart of worship and our love for God begins to wane. We forget how wonderful God is when we fail to remember. Satan constantly works to keep us from seeing God’s majesty and His glory.

Now, this is important because God does not open up the flooded Jordan River every day. God does not cause the walls of Jericho to fall every day. God does not cause the sun to stand still every day. Many days in our life are quite ordinary, quite boring, frankly. Many days, as we look at this world, it might seem like evil is actually winning. These leaders who Joshua is speaking to have experienced some amazing days, but for the most part, over twenty years, they mostly are just ordinary days. When we forget God’s past wonders, we think that God is through doing wonders. We even forget that He actually does them. So we get discouraged and we stop worshiping.

So as New Testament believers, what must we remember? The answer is we ought to remember the same things that the people in Joshua’s day needed to remember. That is that God fights on our behalf to bring us His mercies and His grace. That’s what God does. He is constantly fighting on our behalf to bring us His mercies and His grace. God works in our real world. It’s not just a world of spiritual make believe, kind of fuzziness. No, He works in the real flesh and blood world. He works in human history. When we forget these things we begin to move away from Him and our faith begins to diminish and we lose sight of why we’re here. So God gives us remembrances to strengthen us in our battle, to fire us up in our worship.

Here, what were the remembrances in Joshua? Oftentimes, they are just simple rocks. Remembrances don’t have to be complicated things. Most remembrances can be the most simple of things. But the application for us, especially spiritual leaders, is let’s take some time and find ways to remember God’s workings. Let’s remember His working in our individual life, His working in our families, His working in our church. Let’s remember that. One of the sweet things about being outside is the cross that is behind us. It’s easy to look at the cross and not think of anything, because a pile of stones doesn’t necessarily cause us to remember. But why did we put a cross on the outside of the building? The answer is because we wanted something to help us remember the most important day in all of life, when God come in the flesh died upon a cross and defeated sin, defeated death, and He rose the third day. That’s worth remembering! So we set up these memorial stones like crosses and other kinds of simple remembrances that would help us to understand who God is and what God has done and what God has promised.

***9*** *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.*

Here’s how powerful God is. He has shown it in the past.

***10*** *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.*

The key reality that the Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us is that God works for us to do that which would be impossible for us to do. What is that? Well fundamentally, it’s the work of salvation. Fundamentally, it’s adoption into God’s family. Fundamentally, it’s securing a forever home with God, and inheritance forever with God. We as sinners have no access to be able to perform that kind of work. If all our lives we worked and worked and worked in order to gain forgiveness of sin, in order to gain right relationship with God, in order to secure a home in heaven, it all would be vain. It would all be empty because not one of us has access to do that. Not one of us has the ability to perform that and accomplish that work. But what God tells us in His Word and what Joshua says is that it’s the LORD who fights for you. He sent His Son, Jesus, to fight for you. So remember. Not only remember God’s working, but also

**Directive #2: Receive God’s Word**

***6*** *Therefore, be very strong*

In other words, be brave. Don’t let fear paralyze you.

***6*** *Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses,*

The Book of the Law of Moses has just recently been written. We have had this Book for centuries and centuries of time and we know it’s special. It’s a Book that has endured. In Joshua’s day, it was a Book that had just been written only about thirty years earlier. Yet here, it takes a central place in the community. He says, “Be careful

*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,*

Don’t go this way or that way, away from it.

***7*** *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,* ***8*** *but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day.*

Joshua understands that slow compromise of allegiance to the Lord is an ever present risk. He doesn’t see these leaders diving off a cliff in unbelief. But he sees them gradually getting used to the gods of the Canaanites and starting to listen to the music and starting maybe attending some of the services and maybe starting to marry some of the women who worship these gods. And slowly, their hearts get turned from the Lord God to compromise and ultimately to be devoted to other gods, which leads to disaster. You see, spiritual disaster presses into us little by little. Rarely does it press into us all in one big sweep. What is our protection from spiritual compromise? It’s God’s Word. That’s the only protection we have. Joshua ends where he began. Remember Joshua 1:8, when God says

**Joshua 1:8** This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

The protection of the Israelites against spiritual apostasy and disaster is not in becoming experts in the Canaanite religion. It’s not in becoming experts in the Canaanite philosophies so that they could argue against it and so that they could interact with it. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with believers learning the philosophies and theologies of the secular world. It’s just overwhelming if we set our attention upon trying to learn all the false ideas about God that there are in this world. Certainly, as we learn about the false ideas about God, and again, that can be commendable to a certain degree. We have to remember that the most basic fundamental commitment that protects us is not learning about how to argue against the philosophies of this day. How many philosophies of this day does the church confront? It’s impossible for any person to become an expert in all of them. So what is it that God calls us to do? Be people of the Book! First and foremost, we are people who know and understand what God has revealed to us through His Word. This is our protection. Everything else flows from this. Why is the Word so necessary to spiritual leaders? Because the Word is the means by which we cling to God. Do you see that in verse 8?

***8*** *but you shall cling to the LORD your God*

This word “cling” is used in Genesis 2 to describe how a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife. He holds fast to his wife. It’s that kind of relationship, so that the two might become one. In other words, when he says “but you shall cling to the LORD,” it’s a language of complete commitment. It’s language of loyal devotion and deep affection. Cling to the LORD your God. God’s Word is the means that God has given us so that we can love Him, so that we can cling to Him.

**Joshua 22:5** Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

In verse 11 He says the same thing.

***11*** *Be very careful,*

What do those words imply? Those words imply that there is energy, that there is purpose, a priority. There is intentionality behind our involvement with God’s Word. Leaders will fail if we are not people of the Book. That’s true for dads. It’s true for moms. It’s true for teachers. It’s true for elders, deacons and deaconesses.

Now, here’s a caution. Many listen to God’s Word with no benefit whatsoever. Can I say that again? Many sit underneath the teaching of God’s Word and even read God’s Word every morning with no benefit to their life whatsoever. Being in the presence of the teaching of God’s Word or even involved in the readings of God’s Word by themselves will not bear fruit in our soul. What does cause us to have the Word of God received in a way that brings fruit? It’s when we receive it by faith. We receive it like a hungry man reaching out for bread. If there is a table full of food and we’re already feeling satiated, we look at it and say, “Oh, that’s good. I bet that tastes good.” But if we are starving, we look at that table totally differently. God would have us come before His Word like people who are hungry, people who are thirsty. We take hold of God’s Word with desperation and with desire.

To receive the Word is much, much more than hearing the Word and agreeing to it. To receive it is to embrace it with a lively faith, to possess a zeal for application, an earnestness to hold onto it as though our very life depends upon it, because it does. It is to grab hold of the Word with an interest in the nourishment of God’s Word flowing to our spirit. Such reception sets the whole person in motion. Every part of us becomes enlivened. Receiving the Word is never passive, but it’s a sweaty, laboring, lively action. Just as a picture of a bonfire brings no warmth to our body, so passive listening to God’s Word brings no warmth to our soul. Docile hearing is like a bird without wings, a knife without an edge, a cloud without rain. It is an empty thing. A person who would receive spiritual life from the Word of God must plead with God and wrestle with God and refuse to let go of God until God blesses him. Such a walk is vigorous. It’s never dawdling. In James, he tells us that we must

**James 1:21-22** …receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Paul commends the Thessalonians. He says

**1 Thessalonians 2:13** And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

That’s what it means to receive.

When I was 13 years old I began to receive the Word for the first time. In other words, I opened it up and I saw things in God’s Law that amazed me and that filled me and that enriched me and that transformed me. The Word of God began to change my life at 13, when I started opening up God’s Word and receiving it by faith. I couldn’t get enough of it!In college I remember sitting at my desk and often having the experience as God was speaking to me through His Word, of just weeping with a glad heart that God Himself was speaking to me and changing me by His Word. That was over 43 years ago when that first experience happened. Many, many times I have opened up God’s Word and do you know what? Nothing! Why? Why on one hand I open up God’s Word and I receive such transformation that it moves me to tears? And why on the other hand I open up God’s Word and I don’t feel any change at all?

If you’ve had a time when you’ve experienced the life of God coursing through your heart as the Holy Spirit speaks to you through the Word, I urge you to remember it now! Perhaps for some of you, the Word of God has come to you and laid barren for years and years and years. You listen to sermons, you open your Bible to read in the morning, you’ve gone to ABC groups and Small Groups, and whenever the Word of God is read, it’s like, nothing. Here’s what Satan wants to discourage you with. He says, “What you once experienced, that was not real!” Well, let me tell you, my beloved brother and sister, that actually was real. What you’re experiencing now is the thing that is fake and false.

If you have God’s Spirit in you, you know that God’s Word is living and active. You know that it has the power to bring transformation. You’ve experienced that. What is false is where your heart is. That’s what is deficient. The defect is never in the Word of God, that somehow it stops having power to change us. What is defective is the heart that receives the Word of God, the heart that has grown cold, distracted, calloused. How confident can I be in God’s Word? The answer that Joshua gives is God’s Word never fails.

***14*** *“And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, 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.*

Not one word has failed! That’s how confident he is. We fail; God’s Word never fails us.

What can we do? Well, I want to make a couple applications before we look at the last point. First, don’t give yourself to lifeless substitutes. I get so concerned when somebody thinks, “Well, the Word of God used to have this effect upon my life and it’s not anymore. So what I need is something else. I need some other book. I need some other philosophy. I need some other thing that brings this feeling, that brings back this kind of experience.” I want to tell you, don’t give yourself to lifeless substitutes. There are no other means other than the gospel, other than the Word of God that He has given us, to bring us life.

Secondly, devote yourself daily to active listening to God and to zealous submission to His Spirit. God will meet you. It still has the power to bring life to you. Third, I would encourage you to share what you receive with others. This is the essence of Christian fellowship.

So Joshua says to these leaders to remember God’s workings. Then make sure that you receive God’s Word by faith, day by day by day by day. That’s what is needed. It’s needed in homes. It’s needed in personal lives. It’s needed in Christ’s church; leaders who are just people who receive by faith, active faith.

**Directive #3: Respect God’s Warnings**

I won’t spend long here, but these are sobering words.

***11*** *Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God.*

It’s all about this relationship that God has with His people. It’s never just about externals. It’s never just about outward appearances. It’s about this real relationship that is rooted in love. He says

***12*** *For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you,* ***13*** *know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you.*

Joshua is 110 years old. He understands life and he understands the spiritual realm. He sees some spiritual dangers in his older years that he didn’t even recognize in his younger years, and that’s what he’s warning about. Do you recognize how close apostasy is to any one of us? Apostasy is always a present and very near danger to an unexamined life. I wish in my life I could say that I’ve never known anyone to apostasize from the faith. I cannot say that. From the time when I was a college student, I’ve known close friends who served alongside of me. One of the guys who was nearly best man in my wedding went to Bible School and Seminary, and is no longer a believer. He stopped becoming a believer in his early 20’s. I wish apostasy was such a far off danger that I could say, don’t worry about apostasy. Don’t worry about unbelief invading your heart. But I have to tell you that the greatest gift God has given you is your faith in Him because it connects you to Him. It connects you to relationship. It connects to His blessings. Guard that faith! Protect it!

That’s what Joshua is saying, here. Listen to God’s warnings because if we’re careless, if we’re not careful to do, to follow, to receive God’s grace daily, then what happens? Well, the enemy becomes a snare and a trap. Picture a rabbit hanging upside down with its feet in the air, waiting for the hunter to come along to snap its neck. That’s the picture. He says that can happen to you. He says it’s also like a whip on your side. Picture a slave just being tied to a post and lashed and lashed and lashed and lashed. That’s you. He says that could happen to you. Then he says it’s like a thorn in your eyes. It’s not like a little small rose thorn, but one of these three inch ones just stuck in your eye and you can’t get it out. He says that’s what can happen to you. Think of how painful and how miserable that would be. He goes on to say

***14*** *“And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, 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.* ***15*** *But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you*

This is His people!

*all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the LORD your God has given you,* ***16*** *if you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you.”*

What Joshua is saying is you know God is faithful, don’t you? You know God is faithful! You’ve seen His faithfulness and His blessings. If He promises to bless you, He’s going to bless you. That never stops. Not one time does God fail to bless people who He promises to bless. But then Joshua turns the corner.

We often think of the faithfulness of God as this lovely, comforting, heartwarming attribute, and it is. It is for those who hold onto Christ by faith. But he turns the corner and says God’s faithfulness is a terrifying thing to those who disobey and rebel. That’s a terrifying thing! How is it terrifying? Because if God promises that there is a certain wrath to come, a certain judgment upon all those who remain in their sin, God is faithful to that promise. There is not one person to whom God promises good that won’t receive the good. Not one word will fail to come to pass. But here’s a sobering thing. There is not one word of God’s promise of judgment to come, whether it’s discipline for a believer or whether it’s ultimate condemnation, judgment and wrath for one who resists Christ. There is not one person who escapes that, because God is faithful. That’s what Joshua is saying. Respect God’s warnings!

God doesn’t ever warn us because He hates us. God warns us because He loves us. He wants us to be free of the terror and of the harm that our sin would bring us. Joshua understands that the main danger that threatens the welfare of Israel is spiritual. He’s not concerned that this is a people who, because they’re smaller and there are a lot of enemies, they are going to get run over militarily. He’s not concerned that the economy is going to crash and that people won’t have jobs. He’s not concerned that there’s going to be a pandemic and that there is going to be all kinds of sickness and people are going to die from it. Those are all real threats, but that’s not his concern. His concern is spiritual apostasy, spiritual lethargy. Because he knows if that happens, there is no future. There is no hope. That’s why he’s saying to listen to the warnings of God. Don’t enter into them. Wherever your life might be, wake up!

You perhaps have had this experience that I’ve had. You’re on a long drive and you’re about at like the eighth or ninth hour into the drive. You’re driving down the road and all of a sudden, you’re jolted and it startles you, doesn’t it? You’re tired, so you’ve faded over to that white line. And in that white line, there are these grooves. It’s like it shakes the whole car. At first it’s kind of like, “Why did they put those there? That was disruptive!” But then you realize they put them there for our good, so we wouldn’t careen into the ditch. That’s what God’s warnings are. He’s not there to irritate us. He’s not there even to scare us. It’s there to say, you don’t want to end up in the ditch. It’s terrible over there! It’s disaster!

So as God calls us by His grace, here’s the message: The LORD your God fights for you! Through Jesus, you are more than conquerors through Him who loves you. If you are in Christ Jesus, you have a God who will be faithful to bless you regardless. If you’re outside of Christ Jesus, there is no hope. Run to Christ! How good God is!