

The End of the Story

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- [0:00] Hebrews 4 verse 1. Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands,! Let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.
- ! For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did. But the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.
- Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, So I declared on oath in my anger, they shall never enter my rest.
- And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words. And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.
- And again in the passage above he says, They shall never enter my rest. It still remains that some will enter that rest. And those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in because of their disobedience.
- [1:08] Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it today. When a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.
- For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God.
- For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.
- This is the word. Let's receive it with meekness as it can save our soul. Well, tonight we want to wrap up and put a bow on the book of Joshua.
- We started in the spring and now here we are. And so we want to say goodbye to Joshua with a sense of closure. Hopefully knowing some of the major lessons with the sense that this is what Joshua is all about.
- [2:29] And so, therefore, this is how I should live. And so, the book of Joshua. Here's how I want to begin tonight's sermon.
- And it's really something of what we just sang about that lifelong way. I want you to imagine that you're on a really long road trip.
- You're not at the beginning of it. You're not at the end of it. You're in that place where the excitement of beginning is over. And the excitement of, oh, we're almost there.
- That's not yet where you are. The end isn't close enough to be excited. And maybe you know that feeling. It's 192 miles to Kansas City.
- And your destination is 492 miles past that. And that's how I feel. And I'm sure that's how sometimes you feel about your life.
- [3:30] I've now been a Christian longer than I wasn't a Christian. So, I've been at it at least a little while.

And while we say that the day is closer than when we first believed, I don't necessarily always feel that. And that's why we need and I need the book of Joshua.

Because it shows me the end of a long journey. It shows me that the journey really ended. And in some ways, the end of that long story that God had been writing.

And it shows me that it was a very good end. Very good end. All of the waiting had now, it was worth it. And so, its message is, we need to keep going.

We need to keep going. God will deliver what he has promised. God is faithful. And so, we need to be strong and courageous and keep going.

[4:39] So, that's the first picture. I want you to think about your life as that. A long journey. With a very good ending. And now I want to switch the pictures. Before I go to bed at night, I usually have some book that I read.

I recently told you about King Louis XIV, the Sun King of France. That was a right before bed reading book. That wasn't something really essential to my life. The last month or two, I've been reading books on the Civil War.

And the black experience in America. And I don't recommend it. Because if you want to go to bed sad. Really sad. Then read that kind of book right before bed.

And that's the picture I want you to think about next. The black experience in America. In 1619, a Dutch ship pulled up to Jamestown and unloaded the first black slaves.

And people bought them. And so they had endured that horrific Atlantic passage. And they were sent to a world they didn't know.

[5:50] To a world that they didn't understand. That didn't understand them away from their families. And then in the 1650s, white Christians passed the first racist laws.

And it kept going right up until 1857. When the Supreme Court passed the Dred Scott decision. Where the Chief Justice of the United States said, If you are black, you have no civil rights that the white man needs to honor.

And so it began in 1619. And 250 years of slavery. Years of plunder. And all of the rest. And the whole time there was lots of justifications.

The reasons why it was okay. Why it was actually better that it had happened. And Christians joined in with those justifications. In 1863, they were emancipated in the Confederate States.

And then the 13th and the 14th Amendment were passed immediately after the war. And for about 15 years, there was racial equality in the South.

[6:56] But as soon as Reconstruction ended, Jim Crow laws and lynchings became legal. Practically legal. No one was ever tried or convicted for a lynching.

And so financial robbery and the fraud of blacks in the South was practically legal. In some places, if you wanted to vote and you were black, you had to pass a literacy test.

And if you passed it in English, they would turn around and give it to you in Latin. But it was all good. There was lots of justifications for that. Lots of reasonings. And so this oppression and this self-righteousness went on for another hundred years.

In the North, it was a little better. But there were still racist practices that came right from the top of the government. That decided where people could live.

That created an underclass. And so that's the... It's not a pretty picture. It's not a picture that's really calculated. I'm not saying all of that to make you feel good.

[8:00] It doesn't make us feel good. But that's the picture I want you to have. That's the shoes that I want you to walk in. Because in some ways, their experience mirrors our experience as Christians.

Because here we are in a world that doesn't understand us. In a world where we don't feel like we belong and we are hated and we're blamed.

And there's all these justifications for all of it. And that's our place in this world. It's not our home. And so it's this struggle that doesn't ever seem to end.

And we ask ourselves, will it ever change? Will it ever be different? And that's why I need the book of Joshua. Because that's how I feel sometimes.

But the book of Joshua shows us that even though that's where the story begins, that's not where the story ends. A stranger in your own land.

[9:01] In a world that hates you and yet blames you. Also irrationally and so ruthlessly. That's why I need the book of Joshua. Because Joshua is in a way that the end of a story that began in Egypt.

In a land of slavery and oppression. In that burning furnace. And with this wicked, evil Pharaoh seeking to destroy body and soul in any way you could.

But Joshua in the whole Old Testament says, Out of Egypt I called my son. And he heard their cry and he saved them. And then they weren't home yet. They had to go through a howling wilderness.

And for 40 years they wandered. But at last the Lord, the promise keeping God, brought them to their journey's end. Brought them out of slavery.

Out of oppression. And into freedom. Into lands and vineyards and houses and cities where their families could flourish and grow. Where dads could see their sons instead of being carted off or killed or thrown into rivers.

[10:07] Where they could see them grow. And have their own land and their own families. And moms could see their daughters marrying husbands. And having their own gardens and families.

Home. Peace. At last. And that is the book of Joshua. In some ways it's that end of a story. And it had some very dark parts in the middle and in the beginning.

But in the end it came out into the light. It came out all right. And so we need that kind of story to sustain us. To teach us.

That God is faithful. And he can help us. To encourage our hearts. And so as we put a bow on the book of Joshua.

I want to look at two things. Two main things. And the first is what do we learn from the book of Joshua? And then secondly. What should we do? What do we learn and what should we do?

[11:13] And so what do we learn? I have four major lessons. And they all begin with our God is. Our God is. And the first lesson is. Our God is faithful. Our God is faithful.

Please turn in your Bibles to Joshua chapter 21. Verse 45. 21-45. And Joshua 21-45 is a capstone.

It's a theme verse of the book of Joshua. And it kind of puts everything into perspective. And says now this is the big lesson that you need to learn from everything that has been written down.

21-45. And you see it there. Not one of all of the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed. Every one of them. Every one was fulfilled.

The theme of the whole book of Joshua. If we could put it all into one word. It's faithfulness. God's faithfulness. He keeps his promises.

[12:17] And that's what we see in the book of Joshua. In living color. With real people. In real circumstances. With real difficulties. With real time and space.

God keeps his promises. Now remember. He first made this promise. In an impossible situation. He made it to Abraham.

Abraham. Abraham is old. And Sarah is burdened. Barren. And they are as good as dead. And the Lord says in a year.

I'm going to come back. And you're going to have a son. And what was Sarah's reaction? She left. She left. That's impossible.

She's no dummy. Old men. Barren women. Do not have children. That ain't happening. Impossible. A year came around.

[13:15] A year went by. And Sarah had a baby. God is faithful. Isaac was born. Now there were dead and powerful kings all around them.

And the Lord said. Don't touch my people. Do not touch them. And they didn't touch them. They lived as strangers. As sheep among wolves. In the presence of their enemies.

God kept them safe. Well why? Because he had promised. He had promised. And no king is going to stop him. And then later Esau wanted to kill his brother Jacob.

And Laban wanted to connive and trick and deceive Jacob. And then there was a famine in the whole land. But the Lord sent Joseph down into Egypt ahead of time to save them all.

But then there came a time in a Pharaoh who didn't remember Joseph. All he saw was a group that he could oppress.

[14:19] And enslave. And take advantage of. And that's what he did. But in all that they weren't destroyed. Because God was with them.

So they went through the Red Sea. Through many dangers, toils, and snares. They went.

And the Lord kept them safe. The Lord went with them the whole way. And they disobeyed. And he punished them. But in his wrath he remembered mercy. Because he's faithful.

At the beginning of Joshua. Moses the great leader died. But the Lord said.

That doesn't change my plans. That doesn't change what I'm going to do. That doesn't change the situation fundamentally. Because as I was with Moses. I'm going to be with you.

[15:15] I'm going to be here. So God ever faithful. Always steadfast. He says. I promise you land. I promise you rest. I promise you home and peace. And I'm going to give it to you.

But remember the Jordan. Was at flood stage. They couldn't get across. And so God drains the Jordan. Like you pull the plug out of your bathtub.

And the water drains out. And they walk across on dry land. And there are enemies in the promised land. And there are cities. And there are giants. There are giants living in the hills.

And in them fortresses. On those hilltops. Great. Huge. Monsters of men.

The Bible says. Og. King of Bashan. Was a giant. And his bed was 13 feet long. They're giants.

[16:14] And they had the land. And they didn't want to give it up. But our God is faithful. And he's going to do what he promised to do. Giants aren't going to keep him from keeping his promises.

There were five kings in the south. And they allied together. And Joshua sent out his army. And the sun stood still in the sky. And Joshua destroyed them.

And then there was an alliance of all the northern kings. And on the banks of a lake. You can picture it. The lines. The military lines. Soldiers. Miles long. And Joshua's army destroys them.

And the question is how? How did an untrained. Unprofessional. Military. Defeat this huge alliance. Well because.

The commander of the host of heaven. Had said. I'm going now. In front of you. And for some reason. Swords slipped out of hands.

[17:14] And arrows missed their targets. And wheels came off of chariots. And men who. And errand boys. Couldn't find their commanders. And there was confusion. All through the camp. Because the commander of the armies.

Of heaven had showed up. And he was fighting for his people. And so God. Kept his promises. He kept his promises in Egypt.

And he kept his promises in the desert. And at the Red Sea. And he kept his promises in the rivers. And in the cities. And in the fields. And by the lake. In front of kings.

And against giants. And so Pharaoh in his palace. And giants in their hilltop fortresses. Nothing could stop the Lord. From doing what he had promised. And so the big message of Joshua.

Of this whole book is. What God said he will do. He will do. What God said he would do. He did. What God says he will do. He will do.

[18:14] And so we're. We're going to make it to the end of our journey. Can you believe that? One day we are going to put this life. And this world behind us. And we are going to walk into.

The promised land. Through many dangers. Toils and snares. All of our own. Against enemies. As great and as awful as giants. The long.

Dark. Difficult. Struggle. Will be over. Against powers in high places. Against hatred and self-justification. Rest is coming.

Heaven is coming. Homes. Palaces. Mansions. Peace. Shalom. Is what he promises. He said I'll do it.

And not one of his promises. Will fail. I'd rather pray that. All of the promises are yes. And amen.

[19:12] So be it. In Jesus Christ. Because our God is so faithful. We can say amen. Before the promise is even. In our hands.

Because it is as sure. As we already have it. All of his promises. None of them fail. Second. What do we learn? We learn that our God. Is gracious.

Our God is gracious. Did Israel deserve. This kind of. This kind of treatment. Did Israel deserve. This kind of help. No.

But he was kind to them. In their need. He was good to them. In their distress. They were overmatched. Wherever they looked. Overmatched.

But God is gracious. Jordan River. At flood stage. Too much. Jericho. Walls too high.

[20:09] Too. Too much. Five southern kings. Too much. A huge northern alliance. It's too. Much. These. Things. Are harder.

Are greater. Are bigger. Are too much. For the people of Israel. They didn't have what. It took. But God did. They didn't have the strength. But God did. They didn't have the. The ability.

They didn't have. The resources. But he did. They couldn't pull it off. But he could. And he did. And they're no different than us. We don't have what it takes.

And we feel that. Don't we. Again and again. It's too much. This is too hard. I don't. I don't have what it takes. We're overmatched with sin. We're overmatched with. The difficulty of a trial.

We're overmatched by sin. And Satan. The world. The flesh. The devil. It's all too much. But where does my help come from? Our help comes from.

[21:06] The Lord. The maker of heaven. And earth. And he helps us. Our help is on high. Our God is gracious. In our weakness.

Our God is gracious. Remember Rahab. Prostitute. Not a reformed. Prostitute. Not yet. Not an ex-prostitute.

Not yet. But of all the people. In Jericho. The Lord loved her. The Lord had mercy on her.

He saved her. He rescued her. Everyone else in Jericho. When they saw the armies. Of the Lord. They strapped on their swords. And they got ready to fight.

And Rahab saw the same armies. And she surrenders her life to the Lord. The only one. They're strapping on their swords to fight. And the Lord had put something different in her heart.

[22:04] And she said. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God. She committed to them. And so here's Rahab. Dirty. Defiled.

Unworthy. Despised. Outsider of outsider. And you know what? The great. Great. Lots of great. Grandmothers. Grandmother of Jesus Christ.

The Lord chose her. To be. The great. Mother of. Jesus. The son of God. Our God is gracious.

Does not treat people like their sins deserve. He gives help. And weakness. And so if you feel like Rahab. Unworthy. Defiled.

Unacceptable. Unworthy. Or if you feel like Israel. Like everything is too much. You have a God that is gracious. Our God is gracious.

[23:04] He's kind beyond all measure. Third. Our God is mighty. Our God is mighty. The Jordan River writhed. Writhed. When he showed up.

And separated at his word. And Jericho's walls fell to the ground. You remember. It was the weakness of a shout. The weakness of a shout. And remember.

The sun beating on those walls. Had way more energy. Than all the sound. That Israel can muster. And yet. It was the weakness of a shout. It was man's utter weakness.

And God pushed down the walls. And they fell down. Flat. Flat. And then remember. In the south. They didn't need more troops. They didn't need more weapons.

They didn't need more horses. Or anything. They needed more time. But where do you get more time? And so Joshua prays to the Lord. Of heaven and earth. He says. Please make the sun stop.

[23:58] In the sky. And the moon in the sky. And the Lord. For Joshua's sake. For Israel's sake. Stops. The earth. Spinning. The solar system.

In its course. In its course. And the Lord is mighty. For his people. He'll. Pause time. For them. He'll stop sun and moon.

He'll make waters fall back. He'll push down walls. That's your God. That's what the book of Joshua is saying. This is your God. He's mighty in battle. Mighty in battle.

Now fourth. What do we learn? We learn that our God is not to be trifled with. Our God is not to be trifled with. He will not leave the guilty unpunished.

That's a part of who he is. He's gracious. Merciful. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished.

- [24:59] And when the time came. When the sin of the Amorites had reached its fullness. Nothing could save them.
- Rivers. Giants. Cities. Fortresses. Alliances. Nothing could save them from God's hands. The biggest armies.
- Couldn't stop them. Stop him. And think about Achan. Now he's hiding. And he has dirt. And a rug.
- And a tent. All to cover his sin. Cover my sin. No one will know. No one will know. I can hide it. But God doesn't leave the guilty unpunished.
- A God will not be trifled with. He is gracious. He is mighty. He's faithful. But Joshua shows us a God who deals with sin.
- [26:09] Deals seriously. The wages of sin is death. And God pays the wages. A lot of people want to.
- A lot of people want God to answer. For everything you read in Joshua. They want God to come up with a good apology.
- For the invasion and the conquest of Palestine. A lot of people call it. Just barbarian behavior. And hate. And violence.
- And religious craziness. They want God to answer. But search.
- Search. Search. Search. Search. Search. And search. Some more. Throughout the whole Bible. And you will never find God. Offering an excuse. Or an apology. Or repenting. In any way. Or any fashion.
- [27:06] For. What we have read. In the book of Joshua. The earth is the Lord's. And everything in it. And all the people in it. And it's simple.
- God will deal. With sin. He's not on trial. The Amorites were on trial.
- He wasn't on trial. Achan. Was on trial. And our God is gracious. But never for a moment. Is he a God to be trifled with.
- For that grace to be abused. To think that we could escape. To think that. We'll be able to outrun the consequences. The book of Joshua says.
- There's no outrunning the consequences. Your sin will find you out. And so here's. Joshua. This book shows us. Our God. In living color.
- [28:07] In real life. He's acting with real people. And interacting with real people. And working for them. And he's faithful. And he's gracious. And he's mighty.
- And he's holy. And here he is. Acting. In time. In space. And so. Do you want to know. What he's like? Well. The book of Joshua. Shows you. What kind of God he is.
- The kind of God. That we pray to. The kind of God. That we are saying. We want to obey. And give our lives to. The kind of God. That is revealed. Throughout the scriptures. The book of Joshua.
- Is saying. This is your God. And he's still. Our God. He's still the God. That we have to deal with.
- He's still the God. That we hope in. And so. What do we. What should we do? Now to the second main point.
- [29:04] This is much shorter. What should. Should we do? Well. What is. That ongoing. Refrain. In the book of Joshua. It.
- Keep. It kept coming up. Again. And again. And again. A certain thing that. They were to do. In a certain way. That they were to act. The. Joshua's constant refrain.

Again. And again. And again. Sometimes from God's mouth. Sometimes from Joshua's mouth. Sometimes from. Other people's. To Joshua. The constant refrain. Is be strong. And courageous.

Be strong. And courageous. Be. Strong. Now. If this is your God. And this is what. He has. Promised you. How do you respond?

You be. Strong. You act. Strongly. You act. With strength. And so. If you're lifting weights. And you're getting ready to do. A deadlift. And you're.

[30:00] A deadlift. Where you just. Stand up with a. Heavy barbell. And you are now ready to. Go for your max weight. What do you need to do? Well. You take a deep breath.

You psych yourself up. You put on your gloves. Or your wraps. Or your chalk. Or whatever you're going to use. And. You set yourself. You brace yourself. And then you pull.

You act with strength. Strength. And that's what. The book of Joshua. Is continually. Encouraging us to. Be strong. Show for strength.

Act with strength. We talked about. In the beginning. Of how hard it is. And how dark. And long. And difficult. The Christian life can be. And so.

What is going to get you through. To the end. Strength. Strength. Strength. Be strong. Act with strength. We sing a song.

[31:02] That says. Fight manfully. Onward. Fight manfully. Onward. Be courageous. If we really get the book of Joshua.

You know what it's going to do. It's going to make us. Courageous Christians. Not pessimistic. Not fearful. Not inactive.

Courageous. The courage of Jesus. That he set his face like a flint to go to Jerusalem. The courage of Jesus to come to this earth.

To face a world of trouble. And you know what? The spirit of Christ is in you. That same spirit. Of courage. Of courage.

Of courage. To not run. But to face it all. And to win the prize. For which he's called you. The prize of the good and faithful.

[32:02] And so. What did Joshua and all of those Israelites have to do. If they were going to win the promised land? Well they had to put away that hopeless.

Faithless. Fear. Of their parents. We read about it in the Hebrews. The first generation. Were not courageous. They had no faith in God.

And so they were always fearful. And they didn't gain the land. But the second generation. Their children did. The difference was courage. Fueled by faith. So how do we do that?

Well. We look. And we act on. The God of Joshua. Daniel 11.32. Those who know their God.

Will do exploits. Or another way of translating it. Those who know their God. Will be strong. They'll stand firm. Do you see the connection. Between the first part.

[33:03] And the second part. The first section. And the second section. Where does strength. Where does courage. Come from. Well knowing your God.

Knowing your God. Knowing that your God is faithful. That he is strong. That he is holy. That he is gracious. If you know.

The God of Joshua. You will act like Joshua. If you know the God. Of Joshua. And the God of David. You will act like David.

And you will go down. Into the valley. And face the giant. There is no. Physical. Or fundamental difference. Between. Us and Joshua. Or us and David. They knew their God. And they were strong.

And they were courageous. So. Like David. You will go down. Into the valley. Against Goliath. And like Daniel. You will face kings. And. That is. Really the. Brothers and sisters.

[34:01] Our elder brother. Our savior. The spirit. Of Christ. Our brother is the lion. Of the tribe of Judah. And if.

And if we believe in him. And by faith in him. We can be those kind of lions too. Not afraid. Not running.

But engaging. And enduring. And persevering. Because one greater than Joshua. Has come. The second Joshua.

The heavenly Joshua. The last Joshua. And his Jordan. Wasn't a river. It was death. And his Jericho.

Was not a man-made city. It was the gates of hell. And they don't stand against him. And his promised land. Is eternal life. New heavens.

[35:03] And new earth. And he brings his people in. Whoever. Will stick with him. And follow him. He takes them into the promised land. And so we read it.

There remains a. A rest. For the people of God. And Hebrews said. You know this. Great rest. That is promised. Throughout scripture. It wasn't one that Joshua gave.

It's one that the second Joshua gives. So there remains a rest. For the people of God. And so. Be strong.

Be courageous. And make every effort. To enter that rest. That's the message of Joshua.

It points us to Jesus. And Jesus says. Now be strong and courageous. And follow me. And so that's the great message of Joshua. Don't miss it.

[36:03] There is a heaven to win. There is fear to put behind us. There is cowardice to put behind us. So be strong and courageous.

That's the message of Joshua. Don't miss it. And don't forget it. Let's pray. Our Lord Jesus.

We thank you. That you came from heaven to earth. With courage and faith. And you faced. Your enemies. And you were not.

Put off. You did not run. But for the joy set before you. You endured the cross.

You endured all the darkness. And you went down into death. And came out on the other side. As our pioneer. As our forerunner.

[37:01] Our great and good shepherd. So help us to follow you. Over. Hill. And into valley. Wherever you lead us.

Help us to be strong. And courageous. To keep our eyes on you. To keep our eyes on you. Our God. And our Father. Mighty in battle. Faithful.

Steadfast. Steadfast. In your love. Oh Holy Spirit. Open up our eyes. And open up our hearts. Unclear our vision.

And press these realities. Onto us. That we might live lives. That are worthy. Of the gospel. Worthy of our God. That in our weakness.

We might be strong. And in our poverty. We might be rich. Because we have Jesus Christ. As our Savior. And as our King. Lord please help us.

[37:59] To remember these things. And not to forget them. I ask this in Jesus name. Amen.