

• *Joshua's final words to the leaders*

1. A reminder of God's goodness

• *Israel's faith based on historical facts*

• *God's acts in the past guarantee His acts in the future*

• *Looking back – God is good – God is faithful*

2. Experience of God's help dependent on their loyalty to Him

• *Obedience to the law of Moses*

• *No other gods – only Yahweh*

• *Consequence of their adopting Canaanite religion - removal from the land*

Canaan has been conquered to the extent that no pagan tribe is strong enough to threaten Israel's existence in the land. Joshua is now old. Some more years have passed since the events of Joshua chapter 22. Joshua wants to give two last farewell addresses, one to the officials of the land and one to the whole people. First he gathers the leaders together to give them some last words ^{□1}.

□1 23:1-2a

1. He reminds them of God's goodness. It was not because of their own cleverness that they had achieved so much. They were weak and had often been very willing to go astray. Joshua gives a historical survey of everything that God has done for them. God has given them victory over the Canaanite nations ^{□1}; Joshua himself has designated the areas of the land west of Jordan which they will inherit ^{□2}.

□1 23:2b-3
□2 23:4

These things are sheer facts. Israel's faith was based upon facts. Christian faith is based on the same facts but then there are more things that have happened since that time. It was a fact that God had destroyed the power of the pagan nations. It is a fact that Jesus has come, Jesus has died, Jesus has risen from the dead. Israel's faith and Christian faith is based upon certain events in history. God had done so much for them.

He will give the Israelites victory if they will continue the last remaining work of driving out the Canaanites ^{□1}. God's acts in the past are the guarantee of His acts in the future. What He has been to them before, He will be for them again.

□1 23:5

It is good for the Christian to have times when he surveys what God has done for him. We look back over the years of our life, back over the story of the church, and we have to acknowledge that God has been good to us. We have perhaps been unfaithful to Him; He has never been unfaithful to us.

2. Their experience of God's help would be dependent on their loyalty to Him as Yahweh, the God of Israel's salvation. More than anything God wants us to know Himself. What was needed in Israel was obedience to the Mosaic law ^{□1}, and the central point of everything in the law was the need for purity of the people as worshippers of Yahweh. More than anything God wants them to know Himself. Any kind of idolatry would be the worst possible sin for them. At the heart of everything they believe is the nature of God and the identity of the God whom they worship. He is the God of the law of Moses, the God who redeemed them by blood, the God of the Passover, the God of the tabernacle who must be approached only by the blood of the lamb. They must not associate at all with any other god ^{□2}. They must cling to Yahweh ^{□3}. Their success in inheriting Canaan is the result of their faith in Yahweh ^{□4}. They must be careful not to deviate from this faith in Yahweh, the God who redeemed them ^{□5}. If they ever adopt the ways of Canaanite religion – which could easily come if intermarriage is allowed – then God's promise to give them the land of Canaan will be restrained and they will be removed from the land ^{□6}. It seems an almost

□1 23:6

□2 23:7
□3 23:8
□4 23:9-10
□5 23:11
□6 22:12-13

impossible threat, because Israel is now firmly established in Canaan, but we know that six hundred years later the Babylonian exile literally did remove almost the entire population of Judah.

They were responsible to press ahead to win the entire land of Canaan and remove every pocket of resistance to Yahweh. The Christian has a similar responsibility. 'Make disciples of all nations...', said Jesus. Every area of this world must be brought to Jesus. It is still true that there is land to be conquered. The weapons have changed but the command to conquer the world has not.

• *Israelite responsibility – the whole land*

• *Christian responsibility – the whole world*

3. God's faithfulness to His threats is as great as His faithfulness to his promises

• *The Christian leader is responsible to constantly remind the people not to forget past blessings*

• *Our greatest need is to take God seriously*

• *Continued enjoyment of the land dependent on loyalty to God*

3. They must know that God's faithfulness to His threats is as great as His faithfulness to His promises. Joshua is about to die; his last words include a testimony to the utter faithfulness and reliability of God. Not a single word of God has proved false ^{☞1} (23:14). We are quick to forget the faithfulness of God to His word. At times when we are in crisis it scarcely seems possible that God's promises will be fulfilled, but then God turns things around or unexpected events happen and God fulfils His promises. Then somehow life moves on and we forget what God has done for us in days gone by. Part of the work of a Christian leader is to constantly remind God's people of what they know already. Joshua's colleagues had had such rich experiences of God's goodness but there is always a danger that the blessings of the past get lost in a vague mist of forgetfulness.

God's past faithfulness must make them take utterly seriously everything He has said. They must know that God's threats are as trustworthy as His promises had been ^{☞1}. If they transgress the covenant that was made on Mount Sinai, they will be exterminated ^{☞2}.

The greatest need in our lives is simply to take God seriously. God has redeemed us and His redemption will not be reversed. God will stay with us. Yet the loyalty of God to His people does not mean that God cannot get angry with His people. The more faithful God is towards us, the more determined He will be to get us to be the way He wants us. Israel had been given the land but continual enjoyment of that land would depend on their continued loyalty to God. It was His land. They had it from Him. He could take it back any time He wanted to.

^{☞1} 23:14

^{☞1} 23:15

^{☞2} 23:16



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