

Victory and Defeat

The Book of Joshua

Our Need for Another Joshua

Joshua 24:1 – 33

Introduction: My Caution to Nick

At times, there are times when a real insight breaks into our minds about how much we need Jesus. A few weeks ago, I went to Plymouth County Correctional Facility to visit a young man named Nick. He had been incarcerated for a few years now for committing a very serious crime. Prior to his arrest, he had been living in my house. At the time, he graduated from high school and wanted to change his life. He had been kicked off the basketball team for using drugs, and he had been to juvie lock-up twice. But he wanted to go to junior college and get a degree. During his first semester, he did well. But my wife and I watched his resolve slowly melt and his ability to make good decisions fall apart. During the second semester, he didn't pay his college tuition, so they withheld his credits. He had a hard time holding down a job. Then he had a hard time finding a new one. Then he started playing video games all day during the summer. Then in the fall, he flaked out on a restaurant job he did get. Then he revealed to me that he had some other debt, credit card debt, I believe. Throughout this time, he stopped doing spiritual things. He and I had studied Scripture together, but he started missing our appointments. And despite the fact that for months, my wife and I cautioned him, and warned him that he wasn't living up to his end of the agreement about him living with us, he continued to flake out. One week in November of 2005, I sat down with Nick and gave him what I said was a final warning. Either he would go back to our original agreement or he would have to leave our house. I said to him, 'You still have a choice, but it seems like you're really headed down the path of irresponsibility. You need Jesus. And you need to get off that other path.' But unfortunately, he and some friends came up with an idea to get some quick money. Within a week's time, they asked a local drug dealer, a woman who used to live in our neighborhood, to loan them \$6k. Then, at least one of them, and perhaps Nick himself although we're not sure what his involvement was, beat her and left her for dead. She survived the attack, though, and when my wife and one of our housemates discovered her in our driveway, she named Nick and others as the ones who did this to her. Nick disappeared for several days, until the police found him and arrested him.

Relevance

Now although that is an extreme example of what we're talking about today, it is precise. By ourselves, we become self-enclosed. But God always wants us to remain open to Jesus. Now we may be in different places with regards to that. Some of you might be in the phase of life called youthful overconfidence, because you're not really self-aware, and you haven't really faced up to how much you are motivated by fear and the desire to control the world around you. Some of you are feeling the need for Jesus, because of what you're facing. Some of you might be in the introverted young adult phase, where you're asking questions about your purpose, your healing, and your stuff, and you're wondering if Jesus is relevant to all that. Yes, we absolutely need Jesus, and nothing shows us that better than the history of Israel.

Context:

Now we're going to look at a very strange section at the end of Joshua. For a few weeks now, you've been studying this book of Joshua and seeing the story unfold. It's been largely a success story of Israel as God brings them finally into the promised land, but there were these weird premonitions of failure. They failed to take Ai. Achan and his family sinned. Now, we come to this statement by Joshua himself, 'You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God.' Imagine how it would be if you went to college and took a letter from your parents. When you get there, you open the letter. You're expecting to read, 'You'll do great.' But what if it read, 'You're going to mess up'? Or imagine taking your first job, and then finding a friendly looking card on your desk from your supervisor. But then you open it up and see that it says, 'You're going to mess up'? How would you feel? That's similar to the feeling that the original Israelites would have felt hearing Joshua. It's how any Jews would have felt reading the book of Joshua. And it's how we feel reading the book of Joshua today. Why in the world does Joshua say that?

What God Did, and Your Choice: v.1 – 13

Let's look at the story. ^{24:1} Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel and for their heads and their Judges and their officers; and they presented themselves before God. ² Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the

River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. ³ Then **I took** your father Abraham from beyond the River, and **led** him through all the land of Canaan, and **multiplied** his descendants and **gave** him Isaac. ⁴ To Isaac **I gave** Jacob and Esau, and to Esau **I gave** Mount Seir to possess it; but *Jacob and his sons went down* to Egypt. ⁵ Then **I sent** Moses and Aaron, and **I plagued** Egypt by what **I did** in its midst; and afterward **I brought** you out. ⁶ **I brought** your fathers out of Egypt, and *you came* to the sea; and Egypt pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. ⁷ But when *they cried out* to the LORD, **He put** darkness between you and the Egyptians, and **brought** the sea upon them and **covered** them; and *your own eyes saw* what **I did** in Egypt. And *you lived* in the wilderness for a long time. ⁸ Then **I brought** you into the land of the Amorites who lived beyond the Jordan, and they fought with you; and **I gave** them into your hand, and *you took* possession of their land when **I destroyed** them before you. ⁹ Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel, and he sent and summoned Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. ¹⁰ But **I was not willing** to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless you, and **I delivered** you from his hand. ¹¹ *You crossed* the Jordan and came to Jericho; and the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Gergashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Thus **I gave** them into your hand. ¹² Then **I sent** the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, but not by your sword or your bow. ¹³ **I gave** you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and *you have lived* in them; *you are eating* of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.’

What God did is spoken of 23 times. And there are strong spectacular verbs, like: I took, led, gave, plagued, brought, destroyed, delivered. What this reminds me of is Aslan in C.S. Lewis’ book *The Magician’s Nephew*. When he creates Narnia, Aslan the lion says, ‘Creatures, I give you yourselves...I give you forever this land of Narnia. I give you the woods, the fruits, the rivers. I give you the stars and I give you myself.’ In fact, what Aslan did in creation is what God did in creation and is what God is repeating in Israel’s deliverance into the promised land. In creation, God brought light out of darkness, life through water, and then placed Adam and Eve in the garden land. God was now bringing Israel back into the original ideal. He brought them out of darkness and through water back into a garden land. Even down to the detail of v.13: ‘I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and *you have lived* in them; *you are eating* of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.’ That’s like God giving the garden to Adam and Eve. They are living in that which they did not build, and eating that which they did not plant. It was all God’s gift.

By contrast, what Israel did is said 9 times, and many of those verbs are not very active verbs: you came to the sea, they cried out, your own eyes saw, you lived in the wilderness, you have lived, you are eating. This is all about what God has done.

But we have questions about what God did to other people: God plagued Egypt (v.5); brought the sea upon them (v.7); destroyed the Amorite (v.8); gave the Canaanites into the hand of Israel (v.11). What is that about? I believe this too is God giving them a choice. He is not actually cutting off their choices, but preserving for them one particular choice. Three points on how I think about this.

First, in our therapeutic culture, we tend to identify goodness with being sympathetic, sweet, and not spanking. But earlier time periods saw goodness as fierce and powerful. It was an earlier age in which C.S. Lewis wrote about Aslan the lion as the analogy for Jesus, and Tolkien described Aragorn and Gandalf as aspects of Jesus. So we need to also question our culture. God is fierce and powerful in His goodness.

Second, we do need to pay attention to the Bible and sources outside the Bible concerning the Canaanites. Canaanite civilization and culture had several significant problems. First, they had orgies to ask their gods to fertilize the earth with rain. But my guess is that the more important issue was that they practiced child sacrifice. There is some debate among archaeologists about this, but that’s because some of them are not sure how to interpret the physical evidence (6,000 jars they’ve found, filled with baby bones), because they’re unsure about the literary evidence. The literary evidence is significant, coming from biblical sources, Jewish rabbinical sources outside the Bible, and Greek literary sources, saying that the Canaanites and cultures related to them practiced child sacrifice. What this represents is an evolution in the idolatry of children. All traditional, communal cultures that I know of – like Asian cultures – idolize children. Children represent status, security, prestige, success. So, parents always felt like they needed to control their children. But child sacrifice takes that to another level. It means that people literally and physically suck the life out of children to keep their civilization going. It was the development of

something that began in Genesis 4, with the fairly villainous characters Cain and Lamech. So God's judgment on the Canaanites is not arbitrary.

The broader pattern we see is that any time God says that He's making a judgment, He is revealing and naming what is already there, and judging that. With the Canaanites, He is naming and revealing what is really there, what is already there. In a highly communitarian culture, when the entire culture goes bad, it is almost impossible for any individual to step out of it. It's like an urban youth trying to step out of a gang or today's hip hop culture when no one else is doing so. Is it likely that they'd do it? It's almost impossible. Only Rahab did so, back in Joshua 2. But would any more Canaanites have come over to join Israel? The strong suggestion of the text is NO. Thus, God is bringing an end to the timeframe because more time would have made no difference. They have made a choice that prevents them from making certain other choices. That's a deeper reality which we don't have time to elaborate on now, unfortunately, but it is profound. And now (I think) they are entrenched, locked in. God could have given them all the time in the world, and they would not have Him. That is what fundamentally brings on the judgment of God. In that sense, God is bringing them straight to Jesus, because they need to meet Jesus before they reject God so thoroughly that they will reject Jesus as well.

Third, ultimately, God will resurrect them and present them with the choice to embrace or refuse Jesus as their king in the ultimate new creation, the new heavens and new earth where the garden is fully planted. Perhaps they've already made that decision implicitly and perhaps not. But one thing is for certain: This is the same treatment everyone else gets. And perhaps God is even ending their lives now before their hearts are hardened against Him so fully.

Once we understand that, we can say that this is not 'ethnic cleansing.' It is a kind of moral or cultural judgment, yes. But because Rahab the Canaanite defected from Jericho and came over to Israel, along with her household, and was welcomed, even to the point of marrying an Israelite man and becoming an ancestor of Jesus (Mt.1), we cannot call this 'ethnic cleansing.' The Canaanites had the chance to defect from their culture and morality once Israel got to their doorstep. In fact, they had decades to think about it, because they had heard about the God of Israel delivering Israel out of Egypt in a mighty act. Rahab and her household switched sides. The rest chose not to.

Israel's Choice & Joshua's Warning: v.14 – 27

But it is important that when we look at Israel, we see that God slowed down long enough for certain Jews to get a deeper insight into human nature. This is what's happening here. So in v.14 – 18, God lets Israel choose Him. Joshua says, ¹⁴ Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. ¹⁶ The people answered [fairly confidently] and said, 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; ¹⁷ for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. ¹⁸ The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.'

But there is one Israelite who does not agree: Joshua himself. ¹⁹ Then Joshua said to the people, 'You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you.'

Now that raises a lot of questions, I'm sure. What does it mean that He will not forgive their sin? Or that God would harm and consume them? Basically, when Israel sins like Adam and Eve sinned, God will drive them out of the garden land, just like He drove out Adam and Eve from the garden. In that sense, the words of Hebrews 2:2 are true: 'every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty.' God coming in Jesus was not a way to punish Jesus instead of humanity. It was a way for God to transform humanity by joining human beings to Jesus and killing them and then raising them with Jesus.

Joshua has the preliminary insight that his people, and he himself, cannot truly serve God as they are. Perhaps it came for him when he met the angel of the Lord and asked, 'Whose side are you on?' and the angel said, 'My own

side.’ Joshua might have suddenly been struck that he, by himself, would always make the mistake of thinking that God is on their side in a simple sense, rather than Israel needing to be on God’s side. That insight will spread.

How did the Jews come to know this? Because Joshua was starting to piece things together.

Adam and Eve

Noah and his wife

Patriarchs

Israel as a whole

It began with Moses, in Deuteronomy 27 and onwards, predicting that Israel will fail. Joshua repeats that warning here. More Jews will come to agree: the authors of the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings, and most of all, David, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. David says, ‘Create for me a clean heart’ in Psalm 51. ‘We need a new heart’ in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. There is something deeply flawed in humanity, not just Jewish humanity but all humanity. That is an intuition that sometimes emerges with brilliance even in the Jewish community nowadays. Read William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* and you’d agree. And there are others.

Illus: Repeating grades because you failed a year of school

Illus: Groundhog Day

David’s line

Ultimate Son of David

Illus: Matrix Reloaded

Illus: Our sin is cyclical. A good friend of mine realized that one of her problems of procrastination has deep roots. She writes on her blog, ‘I think my growth in this area was seriously stunted at the age of 5, when I did not finish the diary I was supposed to keep for summer vacation, and my mother did it for me the night before I started the first grade. It may have been reinforced by the reports I used to throw together at the last minute and for which I still got A’s. It may have been further reinforced by the fact my primary weapon in battling my father was my strength of stubbornness in restating a general fact over and over with greater and greater passion, until he gave up and I thought I had won the argument. It was shown to be a far-reaching problem in college (university), when I often ran out of time to read the text that the course was based on, and on a couple of occasions forgot to study for final exams. It was further aggravated when I married someone who was pretty good at organising himself. And further still when I worked for someone who was meticulous about following up on my tasks. It drove me nuts. And now it has come to a head. If I remain vague and wishy washy in this move, I will end up forgetting something huge [as we move]. Like a bed. Or my son. I need to change. I need to CHANGE. I NEED to change.’

Illus: For me, I’ve realized a cyclical part of my life regarding parenting my daughter. My little girl is 5 years old, and is in a phase of life that is difficult to me. Right now, she likes to talk in a baby voice. She gets jealous of her brother really easily. And she gets pouty and sticks out her lip. I really don’t like that, and for all of my life, I stayed away from people like that, especially girls. They had what I called ‘the princess attitude.’ My temptation is to say to my wife, ‘I’ll take care of my son, you take care of her.’ My sin is cyclical. Because I didn’t deal with it the first time, it comes back to bite me now.

So Israel realized over time that God had to change humanity itself. God had made human nature, and it was still fundamentally good in that sense, but something in our humanity has gone wrong. That is what this weird section at the end of Joshua is about: something in our humanity has gone wrong, and we need Jesus to heal it, to realign it, to fix it.

This is why another Joshua stepped into the cycle of human sin to break through it. His name in Hebrew was Y’Shua, or Joshua, even though we call him by the Greek translation of his name: Jesus. This Jesus went to Egypt, like Israel did. He came through the water of the Jordan River, like Israel did. He marched into the wilderness, like Israel did. But in every case, Jesus succeeded where Israel failed. He undid their mistakes. He undid the mistakes of all humanity. Not because it was easy for him. It was a serious temptation. Because his mind just wanted to think private thoughts. His body just craved physical comforts. His emotions wanted to hate the Romans for what they’d done to his people. But every step of the way, every moment of his life, Jesus realigned his humanity with the love of God, with the will of God. So he reshaped a humanity, his own humanity, so it could rise perfected in

his resurrection. He calls to us to share in his new humanity, a humanity that is now perfectly aligned with God, drenched in God.

But the Israelites at this point are overconfident in themselves: ²¹ The people said to Joshua, 'No, but we will serve the LORD.' ²² Joshua said to the people, 'You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him.' And they said, 'We are witnesses.' ²³ 'Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.' ²⁴ The people said to Joshua, 'We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice.' ²⁵ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. ²⁶ And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. ²⁷ Joshua said to all the people, 'Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, so that you do not deny your God.'

The stone and this book would be the witness, the witness against Israel: the stone to symbolize the stone tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments, which Israel would break; and the book of Joshua in which would be recorded the early tremors of Israel's failures. And in fact, added to this book would be the other books of the Old Testament, the record of Israel's failure. But even though Israel would fail, they would ultimately not deny their God. They would hold on. And thus, Israel would produce one of the greatest witnesses to the one true God: the Scriptures. Whereas other Ancient Near East peoples produced literature of self-congratulation, Israel produced a literature of self-criticism. That is not what we would expect from sacred texts from a chosen people. Yet, in a strange but appropriate way, that is evidence that Israel's witness to God is true.

Joshua's Death: v.28 – 33

²⁸ Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his inheritance. ²⁹ It came about after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old. ³⁰ And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of Mount Gaash. ³¹ Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD which He had done for Israel. ³² Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of Joseph's sons. ³³ And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him at Gibeah of Phinehas his son, which was given him in the hill country of Ephraim.