**BE VERY CAREFUL TO LOVE THE LORD**

Joshua 23:1-16

Key Verse 11

 “So be very careful to love the Lord your God.”

**Introduction**



 In this passage, Joshua, the servant of the Lord, delivered a farewell address remembering the victories the Lord had given. Joshua reminded the Israelites of unconquered and unreached land to be possessed. Joshua gave the Israelites the instructions how to live in the Promised Land maintaining God’s blessings, that is to be very careful to love the Lord their God continually. They say that maintaining blessing is more difficult than getting blessing. Joshua had a shepherd heart after God’s own. May we listen to Joshua’s final messages and apply them to our hearts to live by faith.

1. Read verses 1-5. When Joshua was a very old, what did he do? (1-2) What did he remind them of? (3-4) What did he say to them by faith? (5)

1-1, Read verses 1-5.

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

1-2, When Joshua was a very old, what did he do? (1-2)

 ***After a long time had passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, 2 summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them: “I am very old.***

* We don’t know how long time had passed by but a long time had passed since the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them.
* The word “rest” means rest from battle. Finally, the Israelites enjoyed the time of peace in the Promised Land.
* But, the book of Hebrews comments that the Israelites never entered “the rest” despite entering the land of Canaan because it was just a shadow of the eternal rest in heaven.

Hebrews 4:1, 11-13 read,

 “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. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

* As the author of Hebrew pointed out as above, we better rely on the living word of God so that we may be purified, spotless, and refined (Daniel 12:10) to go God’s way instead of being wicked like the majority in the world.
* Joshua summoned Israel’s leaders to come to Shiloh where the tabernacle was located. Probably he was not able to speak to the whole population. He helped the leaders first to have them communicate with the people.

1-3, What did he remind them of? (3-4)

***3 You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you. 4 Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west.***

* As we are getting old, we better think of what kinds of words we are going to leave to the rest of our spiritual and physical family members.
* Surely, we would say very important words to them as our last will. That’s why we cherish the last words of our beloved people. So, we take Dr. Samuel Lee’s last words, “Back to the Bible” as our spiritual legacy.
* Joshua, the general who had led them successfully could have proudly said.But, Joshua gave all the glory and credit to the Lord God in verse 3.
* Joshua reminded the people that it was by God’s help that they occupied the land. It was only because God had made them to be successful in everything.

1-4, What did he say to them by faith? (5)

 ***The Lord your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the Lord your God promised you.***

* It was the Lord God who had done it in the past and it is the Lord God who would continue to enable them to possess their lands.
* But, it does not mean that God alone fought by Himself. The Israelites had to go to the battlefield and face the enemy for themselves.
* They had to go into the land and take possession of the land. God worked together with His people as they engaged in the war.
* God does His work in and through His people. What a balance! God push them out for them and they take possess.
* This principle also applies to Christians today. Philippians 2:12 says, “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”
* We are saved by God’s grace alone, however we have to go through purification and sanctification through our spiritual fighting against our sins by the Help of the Holy Spirit as our obligation. (Romans 8:10)

2. Read verses 6-11. What did Joshua command the people to do? (6-8) How could they be very careful to continually love the Lord their God? (9-11)

2-1, Read verses 6-11.

“Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. **7** Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. **8** But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now.

**9** “The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. **10** One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. **11** So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

2-2, What did Joshua command the people to do? (6-8)

***6 “Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. 7 Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. 8 But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now.***

* Joshua received this word in verse 6 from the Lord as he was raised as a leader in Joshua 1:7 which says, “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you.”
* Now Joshua passes this same word to his people before he dies, for God is good and keeps his good promises. Although it is the same words, Joshua knew it very personally after experiencing God’s faithfulness in his mission life.
* Joshua did not say, “Now relax and put your feet up!” Instead he encouraged them to “go back to the word of God and obey” because their obedience to the Moses’ law was the condition of the covenant.
* Verse 7 are the descriptions of “Do not.” “Do not associate with the Canaanites, do not invoke the names of their gods or swear, do not serve them or bow down to them.”
* There were still remaining Canaanites who surrounded the Israel. The Israelites should not be influenced by evil cultures, idols worship and sinful customs in Canaan.
* In verse 8 “To hold fast” means the action of gripping strongly. We should hold fast to the Lord as if children do not let their parents go away at daycare in the morning, instead cling to their parents tightly.

2-3, How could they be very careful to continually love the Lord their God? (9-11)

***9 “The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. 10 One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. 11 So be very careful to love the Lord your God.***

* With their own might, the Israelites could not drive out even one powerful nation. But with the Lord’s fighting, they defeated all the 31 Canaanites kings.
* Verse 10 says, “One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you just as he promised.”
* How could the Israelites win the victories over these powerful nations and kings? The Israelites did not have as many soldiers as their enemies, not to mention their horses and powerful weapons. But they won the victories again and again.
* For instance, the invincible walls of Jericho fell, when the Israelites circled around the walls in obedience to God’s command.
* At Gibeon battle, more enemies died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites because God hurled large hailstones from sky.
* God even lengthened the day by making the Sun ‘stand still’ and the Moon stop as the Israelites need more time to finish the war. When the Lord was fighting for the Israelites, they could win victories over and over again.
* Look at verse 11. “So be very careful to love the Lord your God.” This verse is another echo of Deuteronomy 6:5.
* In short, “obedience to God’s word, to hold fast to the Lord God and being very careful to love the Lord God” a key to maintain success and victory.

3. Read verses 12-16. What was Joshua’s warning? (12-13) What would surely happen

 if they failed to love God? (14-16)? What can we learn from Joshua’s farewell

 Message?

3-1, Read verses 12-16.

“But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, **13** then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lordyour God has given you.

**14** “Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. **15** But just as all the good things the Lord your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the Lord your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. **16** If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord’s anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you.”

3-2, What was Joshua’s warning? (12-13)

 ***“But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, 13 then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you.***

* Now, Joshua told the Israelites about the painful consequences if they would disobey the Lord God. The acts of disobeying God are to turn away from the Lord and to ally with Canaanites, to intermarry with them and to associate with them.
* All these acts are the signs of loving Canaan culture, idols, Canaanite worship, their men and women rather than God.
* Then the Lord their God would no longer help them to drive out these nations. Instead, they will become snares, traps, and thorn in their eyes.
* They will perish from this good land. Unfortunately, in times of Judges, painful consequences happened when the Israelites were influenced by the Canaanites- idol worship and evil culture.

Judges 3:4 reads,

 “They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the Lord’s commands, which he had given their ancestors through Moses.”

3-3, What would surely happen if they failed to love God? (14-16)?

 ***“Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. 15 But just as all the good things the Lord your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the Lord your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. 16 If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord’s anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you.”***

* God’s promises were given to Abraham initially. God confirmed His promises with Isaac, Jacob again and again. God appeared to Moses when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and reminded him of His promises.
* The promise was to liberate them from slavery and lead them to the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. But it all came true!
* In verse 16, Joshua was concerned that God’s painful promise would be also fulfilled when they disobeyed God’s word.
* The promises of blessing are pleasant to hear. But it is painful to hear of the Lord’s anger burning and people’s perishing from the good land.
* The history of Israel proves this. The promise of God’s painful discipline and judgment also came true when they were taken to Babylon as slaves.
* God is faithful to all His promises whether they are the promises of blessing or of discipline and judgment.

3-4, What can we learn from Joshua’s farewell message?

* Personal reflection

**Conclusion**

Our Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5:18, “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” Now we hold on to Jesus’ promise in Matthew 28:20b**.** “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” As we take our life journey to God’s kingdom in this world, we often feel weary and tired. However, may we lift up our eyes to heaven, love God, cling to Him and obey His words as the people of faithfulness. May we enter eternal rest in heaven and live forever with our Lord Jesus. Jude 21 reads, “Keep yourselves in the love of God.” The word in this verse is “keep”. Continually loving the Lord our God takes diligence. There are many things both within us and outside of us to draw us away from that love. So we better make a firm decision to love God thin or thick, even if the feeling don’t come first and the situation are not in favor of us.

**One word: Love the Lord our God!**