

Jos224 – Blessing or Backsliding? – Joshua 23

Pastor Dave Shepardson Calvary Chapel Nuevo / www.wordbymail.com

Open your Bibles. Let's hear from God in his Word. Title of the message, "Blessing or Backsliding?" We're going to Joshua Chapter 23.

Today we are going to see in Joshua 23, both how to walk in the blessings of God and how to avoid the danger of backsliding.

To backslide means *to slide back into the destructive life that Jesus Christ already saved you from; to fall back toward the sin that was destroying your life before God stepped in and delivered you.*

And I'll give you the big picture truth right up front. We have a role, we play a part, we have a responsibility in whether we will walk in the blessings of God or backslide into the destruction of the world.

The blessings of God are always there for us and backsliding is always a clear and present danger and we need to know how to walk in one and avoid the other. In Joshua 23 we can see how.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, make us ready. Your Word is living and powerful and active, sharper than a two-edged sword. It discerns our thoughts and our intents. We pray today, God, that you would use it to pierce us – to leave a mark. This message from Joshua, Lord, is so passionate and intense for Joshua, we pray you would put us in that position that we would see the intensity and the passion with which he shares it and Lord that you would apply it specifically and powerfully for transformation in our lives. For your glory Jesus, we pray, amen.*

As we get ready to close our study on the Book of Joshua, it's now been twenty plus years since Joshua brought the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. The Lord has given them incredible victories over their enemies, just as he has given *us* incredible victory over our enemies. He has saved us from sin and from destruction over and over again. Israel is in the process of "taking possession" (in varying degrees) of the "Promised Life" that God has given them – just as hopefully we are in that same process.

But now, Joshua is old. He knows life is wrapping up for him and Joshua wants to leave the Children of Israel with strong encouragement and a strong exhortation that (prayerfully) they will remember and follow long after he is gone.

And so in these last two messages Joshua is pouring out his final and maybe most important encouragement to the Children of Israel and that gives these last two messages a special level of significance in Joshua's life and (hopefully) our lives.

We start in Joshua 23:1-2. 3

Joshua 23:1-2 (NLT)

1*The years passed, and the Lord had given the people of Israel rest from all their enemies. Joshua, who was now very old,*
2*called together all the elders, leaders, judges, and officers of Israel. He said to them, "I am now a very old man.*

Twenty plus years of battling in the Promised Land had passed, and the Lord had given Israel a (general) rest from their enemies (though some were still in the land). So Joshua draws the leaders together who would be responsible for passing on these instructions to their tribes.

In this first of his last two messages, Joshua wants to clearly remind us who great God is and how great God's blessings are, and he wants to make two things very clear to us here.

#1) Joshua wants to make it CLEAR **HOW to continue to EXPERIENCE** those **blessings**

#2) -HE wants us to know - **HOW to NOT fall away** from **GOD** - and from **those blessings**

Three times Joshua is going to tell the people how to continue to walk in God's blessings and how to not fall away (which makes this a great preaching example).

He begins in Joshua 23:3-4.

Joshua 23:3-4 (NLT)

3*You have seen everything the Lord your God has done for you during my lifetime. The Lord your God has fought for you against your enemies.* (God has brought you all your victories)

4*I have allotted to you (on behalf of the Lord) as your homeland all the land of the nations yet unconquered*(meaning some of the enemy were still there), *as well as the land of those we have already conquered - from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea in the west.*

God has done great things for you
You have seen him fight for you
You have seen him save you from your enemies.

And then comes this great promise from God. It's a physical promise to Israel but it's an illustration of a spiritual promise to us.

Joshua 23:5 (NLT)

5 This land will be yours, for the Lord your God will himself drive out all the people (enemies) living there now. You will take possession of their land, just as the Lord your God promised you.

(Remember the Promised Land – physical is an illustration of our Promised Life – spiritual.)

That's the promise of God we love...

The Promised Life *will* be ours – God himself will drive out our enemies
We *will* take possession of this life that God himself has *promised* us
God will go *before us* – and God *will bring it* to pass.

If God is for us – WHO can be against us?

It almost seems like we don't even have a role. It almost seems like God will do this no matter what we do or don't do.

But then look at the very next verse.

Joshua 23:6 (NLT)

6 “So be very careful to follow everything Moses wrote in the Book of Instruction . . .

(ESV)Joshua 23:6

6Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written . . .

(NKJ)Joshua 23:6

6 Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written . . .

Guys, we must see two great truths equally together, side –by–side.

#1)God's Promises are STEADFAST – and GUARANTEED, and they are GIVEN to us
– freely BY God's GRACE

AND - #2)Therefore . . . Because of that . . .We must be careful to follow ALL of God's Word. We must be strong and courageous to keep and do ALL of The Word of God.

If we want to know how to continue to walk in the blessings of the Lord and how to not backslide (fall away) from the Lord, we must know it is equally trusting wholly and completely in God's awesome promises and God's awesome power that come to us by God's awesome grace AND we must embrace the fact that we have a role, we have a part to play, we have a responsibility in order to appropriate, take possession of, (walk in) ALL the awesome promises of God.

So, with the reminder of God's guaranteed and steadfast promises, Joshua is going to give us three ways for us to continue to walk in those great blessings from God and not backslide (fall away) from God and those promises.

The first way for us to take possession of God's blessings and not fall away from him is here in Joshua 23:6.

Joshua 23:6 (NLT)

6 "So be very careful to follow everything Moses wrote in the Book of Instruction. Do not deviate from it, turning either to the right or to the left.

If we want to walk in God's blessings and protect ourselves from backsliding into the world, we have got to be committed to actually following ALL of God's Word, not deviating from it and not turning from it – at all.

But... that's not really what we like to do, is it? We like to follow only the parts we like (like the blessings) and we like to not follow the parts we don't like (like the warnings). And then, we like to get angry at God for not giving us all the blessings even though we refuse to follow his Word.

Tell me... in that thing in your life right now, in that choice, in that lifestyle, have you considered whether you are following God's Word or not? And have you truly considered the blessings of following God's Word and the consequences of ignoring God's Word? Because that is the message that Joshua is trying to get across to us today.

The second way to take walk in God's blessings and not fall away from the Lord is in verses 7 and 8. This is a two-sided command. The first side is – don't cling to the world.

Joshua 23:7 (NLT)

7 Make sure you do not associate with the other people (the pagan nations) still remaining in the land. Do not even mention the names of their gods, much less swear by them or serve them or worship them.

The phrase “*do not associate*” in the NLT may be a bit “too broad.” In the original language it is “*Do Not Go Into*” meaning – “*Do Not become Part of*” the pagan unbelieving nations that are still in the Land.

What Joshua is saying is DO NOT get “sucked IN” to the lifestyle of the world around you do not WORSHIP the *world’s IDOLS* do not SERVE the things the *world SERVES*.

And here’s why. Because our enemy who uses the world to draw you away from God. He is not obvious, he is *devious*.

And you can say the entire time, that your love of the world is not drawing you away from God, while the entire time your love of the world is drawing you away from God.

The enemy of your soul is constantly trying to get you to increase your “clinging” to the world in order to get you to release your “clinging” to the Lord.

So verse 7 says DO NOT CLING to the ways or to the things of the world.

And then Joshua 23:8 says,

Joshua 23:8 says (NLT)

8 Rather, cling tightly to the Lord your God as you have done until now.

Guys, if we are clinging to the things of this world we cannot be clinging to the Lord. And if we are clinging to the Lord, we will not be clinging to the things of this world.

I can’t begin to develop all that it means to cling tightly to the Lord, but I would recommend our ten message series called “ABIDE” that teaches us how to abide in (cling to) Christ. You can find that series by going to wordbymail.com or by going to your app store on your phone – search and download wordbymail (one word).

For today, can I just ask you “Are you clinging tightly to the Lord? Or is your grip on Jesus loosening just enough in order for you to hold on a ‘little bit more’ to the world?”

If so, you may be “moving toward” backsliding or falling away from the Lord completely

Finally, Joshua is going to give us the third way to walk in the blessing of God and never be at risk of backsliding. But first Joshua gives us another reminder of the great things God has done (he always goes back to that).

Joshua 23:9–10 (NLT)

9 “For the Lord has driven out great and powerful nations for you, and no one has yet been able to defeat you.

10 Each one of you will put to flight a thousand of the enemy, for the Lord your God fights for you, just as he has promised.

This is a powerful reminder that walking in God's blessing is walking in God's victory and that victory is available for us to walk in.

The third and the greatest way for us to do that is in Joshua 23:11.

Joshua 23:11 (NLT)

11 So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

That's it! The greatest way to ensure that we are walking in the true blessings of God and are never at risk of backsliding is to ***be very careful to love the Lord your God.***

(AMP) To be **VERY WATCHFUL** to Love the Lord Your God

(NKJ) To take **CAREFUL HEED** to Love the Lord Your God

And one of the Paraphrase Translations says ***vigilantly guard your souls: (to) Love GOD, your God***

This is our greatest safeguard to ensure that we are walking in the blessings of God and never at risk of backsliding (falling away).

Why did Moses call all of Israel – in the great SHEMA – to this one thing in Deuteronomy 6:5?

Deuteronomy 6:5 (NLT)–

5 And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

Why must we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength? Because our actions are driven by what we love.

Our actions are not only driven by what we believe! Our actions are driven by what we love. We all know people who “believe” everything the Bible says about Jesus Christ but their lives are still being systematically destroyed by their love for the world and the things of the world.

And James 2:19 says even the demons believe but their belief doesn't change their actions because our actions are driven by what we love, and if we love sin more than we love Jesus, we will ultimately fall more away from Jesus in order to fall more in love with our sin.

In Matthew 22 Jesus said the entire law is based on these 2 commands
Love the Lord your God and
Love your neighbor.

How could Jesus sum up the entire law with just two commandments? Because our actions are driven by what we love.

And the highest and greatest safeguard to make sure we are walking in the blessings of God and safe from the risk of backsliding... is us being *very careful* to maintain an ever-increasing *love* for your Lord Jesus.

So, there are three safeguards that Joshua gives us to ensure that we will continue to walk in the blessings of God and be safe from the risk of backsliding.

- #1) **Be careful to follow ALL of God's Word**
- #2) **Do NOT CLING to the WORLD but instead CLING TIGHTLY to JESUS**
- #3) **Above all – Be very careful to maintain areal, ever-increasing love for your Jesus Christ**

Man that is good! We could stop right there, couldn't we? Buuuuuttt... Joshua's not quite finished yet and these last words of this "last words" speech are the words that we don't want to hear most. Because now Joshua is going to get to the consequences.

We don't like people who talk about the consequences of us backsliding (falling away) from the Lord. But guys, we cannot ignore the warnings and consequences in the Bible. We cannot try to explain them away with some deep and complicated theology.

Instead we just need to read them and be afraid. We need to allow the warnings and consequences in the Bible

To **DRIVE US** - to a deeper **RELATIONSHIP** with Jesus

To **DRIVE US** - to a greater **LOVE** for him

To **DRIVE US** – to a greater **COMMITMENT** to CLING to Him

And so in verse 11 Joshua gave us the greatest command - *be very careful to love the Lord your God.*

And then in Joshua 23:12-13 he says

Joshua 23:12-13 (NLT)

12 "But if you turn away from him and cling to the customs of the survivors of these nations remaining among you, and if you intermarry with them,

13 then know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive them out of your

land. Instead, they will be a snare and a trap to you, a whip for your backs and thorny brambles in your eyes, and you will vanish from this good land the Lord your God has given you.

What about all that

God will do those great things - and bring those great blessings by his POWER, and by his GRACE alone?

That is ALL absolutely true and absolutely guaranteed AND we have a role, a responsibility in whether we will ever (personally) receive (walk in) those blessing from God or not.

Listen, please. Joshua is getting ready to die
he's not playing games
and he's not trying to grow a megachurch.

He wants his family to know
how serious the consequences are for backsliding... for falling away from the Lord and there are some very serious consequences.

And they are not Old Testament consequences only. Just write these verses down in your margin and you can study them tonight. **2 Pet 2:20-21 – Heb 6:4 – Heb 10:26-27.**

And so finally, after all of this passionate encouragement to his own family of Israel, Joshua is going to reiterate first his own intensity. Then he'll reiterate the incredible promises of God. Then he's going to reiterate the warnings and the consequences of backsliding or turning away from following the Lord.

And then that's it – Joshua's message is over. It's like he wants to leave us with something that will sting just a little bit. Something left ringing in our ears that (prayerfully) we will remember.

And so that's how we are going to leave it this morning. I'll read these last verses with little comment, and then we'll pray.

These are three very heavy verses to end with. But please try to grasp the intensity of Joshua's desire for the next generation to wholeheartedly follow the Lord.

Joshua 23:14–16 (NLT)

14 “Soon I will die, going the way of everything on earth. Deep in your hearts you know that every promise of the Lord your God has come true. Not a single one has failed!

15 But as surely as the Lord your God has given you the good things he promised, he

will also bring disaster on you if you disobey him. He will completely destroy you from this good land he has given you.

16If you break the covenant of the Lord your God by worshiping and serving other gods, his anger will burn against you, and you will quickly vanish from the good land he has given you.”

Let’s pray. Lord, Jesus. Move us. You are in the transformation business, and you have all of the power and all of the grace. You’ve paid all of the price to transform us, Lord, but God, our role is to receive it. Our role is to follow your Word. Our role is to cling to you and not to the things of this world. Our role ultimately is to love you. And if we don’t you won’t. Lord, we just pray that we would be moved to seek hard after you, to follow you all our days, to love you, to cling to you, that we would remain in your presence and the center of your blessing, experiencing your power and your peace, and that we would avoid the danger of backsliding. Of falling back into the miry pit that you saved us from. Lord, fill us. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. And give us your power to follow hard after you. Thank you for your Word Lord, for its power to change us. Change us for your glory, and in your name Jesus, amen.