

How to Finish the Race

(Joshua 23)

6/28/17; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

Here are the words to describe the 7 decades of life..

0-10	Spills
10-20	Drills
20-30	Thrills
30-40	Bills
40-50	Ills
50-60	Pills
60-70	Wills

That's kind of a bleak look at life....

Another person described growing older as this..

For many years in my youth, I hopped the fence and chased the greener grass on the other side , but I didn't have enough wisdom to know which green grass was best..

Now that I am old, I know which green grass fields are best, but I dont have the energy to hop the fence..

One thing that is true about all of us is that we are constantly growing older...

Every second of the clock, every day of the week and every passing year makes us older than the year, day or second before...

For some, that's depressing...

For others, age is a blessing...

But how are we to think about growing old?

In fact, what do we want to be like when we approach the end of our life?

Well, tonight we get a good example of what old age should be like for the people of God..

It is shame that many people in the church get more cranky and unpleasant with age...

And instead of becoming an example of what age bring for the believer, they become an example of what to be as a believer ages...

Now tonight, we get to look at and hear from Joshua as he knocks on death's door at the end of his life...

And guess what we see as he grows old?

We don't see a grumpy man but a faithful example of the Lord's servant...

So, let's look at Joshua 23 and find 4 examples of what age who'll bring into our life...

The first example is...

I. Age Brings Humility (1-5)

Let's read verses 1-3 of Joshua 23...

Now it came about after many days, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies [a]on every side, and Joshua was old, advanced in years, 2 that Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders and their heads and their judges and their officers, and said to them, "I am old, advanced in years.

As we near the end of the book of Joshua, Joshua nears the end of his life...

We know that Joshua dies at the age of 110, and it seems best to see this farewell speech in the final days of his life...

The year is most likely 1383 BC...

The conquest of the majority of the Promised Land had been completed about 14 years earlier...

The land had been passed out to the tribes about 7 years earlier...

Now for the most part, Israel was at rest after years of fighting...

Joshua was at rest after years of leading...

Now, there was more land to conquer and more inhabitants of the land to drive out, but the major fighting had been over for some time...

And Joshua was now an old man...

So he calls together the leaders of Israel to address them before he dies....

And he begins his farewell speech in verse 3...

3 And you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the Lord your God is He who has been fighting for you. 4 See, I have apportioned to you these nations which remain as an inheritance for your tribes, with all the nations which I have cut off, from the Jordan even to the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun. 5 The Lord your God, He will thrust them out from before you and [b]drive them from before you; and you will possess their land, just as the Lord your God [c]promised you.

Often times in this part of the country, older people are great story tellers....

My dad is good at it....

It is becoming a lost art to be able to sit on a porch and tell a good story...

The younger generation simply can't sit still long enough to listen....

But often times, older adults have collection of good stories that they learn to tell over and over...

Most of them are entertaining, but often times, the stories make the teller to be the hero of the action...

I don't think that is always intentional but people often like to talk about themselves....

For that reason, it is refreshing to listen to Joshua being his farewell speech and right from the beginning of the address, God is the hero of the story....

In verse 3, Joshua puts it this way to the leaders of Israel...

You have seen all that the LORD your God has done...

Now mind you, it had to be tempting for Joshua to get up and talk about his brave leadership...

How he led Israel across the Jordan....

How he had led Israel into Jericho after the wall fell down...

How he had led the charge to go back and defeat Ai after they had defeated Israel the first time...

Men are known for their war stories that highlight their bravery....

But the people of God should be known for their war stories where God is the One who saves the day...

And that is clearly the intent of the opening part of Joshua's farewell speech...

Yes, he had lived to an old age...

Yes, Israel has conquered the land...

Yes, the land had been passed out...

But God was responsible for it all...

In verse 5, Joshua moves from what God had done to what God will do...

You see, there were still some natives in the Promised Land, and Joshua simply tells Israel to continue to trust the Lord to rid the land of the remaining enemies like he had already proven He could do....

You see the foundation of present and future trust in the Lord are things the Lord has accomplished in our past...

And Joshua knew this...

Look, he is about to die, but make no mistake about it...

His death would not mean the death of the nation...

Because Joshua was not the source of victory, the Lord was...

Joshua's presence is not required for Israel to succeed...

They simply need the Lord's presence..

Let me make a quick application to our hearts here...

As you grow older, the Lord needs to get bigger and get more credit and you need to get smaller and less credit....

John the Baptist said, He must increase and I must decrease...

That's a great way to guide our words as we grow older...

People who get to the end of their lives and have nothing but stories about how great they are not examples of growing in humility...

More years should lead to more humility and more praise of what the Lord has done for us....

That was the case for Joshua and his last words were not for shining the spotlight on him, but upon the Lord...

The second example of what age should bring in the life of the believer is found in verses 5-11...

II. Age Brings Wisdom (6-11)

Verse 6...

6 Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, 7 so that you will not [d]associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods, or make anyone swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them. 8 But you are to cling to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day. 9 For the Lord has [e]driven out great and strong nations from before you; and as for you, no man has stood before you to this day. 10 One of your men puts to flight a thousand, for the Lord your God is He who fights for you, just as He [f]promised you. 11 So take diligent heed to yourselves to love the Lord your God.

Joshua has lived long enough to understand the great benefit and blessing of obedience to the Lord...

As he prepares to leave this world behind, his final words encourage Israel to obey the Lord...

Joshua has experienced the consequences of disobedience....

He had watched Achan steal some gold and silver
and hide them in this tent...

He had watched Israel lose their next battle because
of Achan's sin...

He had watched Achan and his entire family be
killed for their disobedience...

Joshua knew the high price of sin, so as he prepares
to leave the world, he calls the leaders of Israel to-
gether and the second thing he says is simply,
"Obey the Lord."

I guess if I were forced to offer 3 words to my chil-
dren as I face death, it would be those same 3
words...

"Obey the Lord."

So Joshua tells Israel in verse 6...

Do all that is written in the book of the law...

Don't let your life turn to the right or left away from
the law...

Walk the line...

Keep God's word...

And then Joshua gives a specific law that the people of the Promised Land must keep in verse 7...

Don't associate with the unbelieving nations of the Promised Land...

Don't even speak the name of their false gods...

Don't swear by their false gods....

Don't serve their gods, and most importantly....

Don't bow your lives down to their gods...

Now, we don't see the importance of such a command...

Mainly because we have the idea of a false god as a shrine or a idol of gold...

And we move on from these verse very quick thinking they don't apply...

But false gods are everywhere today...

If you think your superior business skills or good work ethic is what provides for your family, you worship a false god...

Because God alone is the One who provides for your family...

If you think your intelligence or looks or personality is the reason for your success, you worship a false god...

Because God is the one who raises up and lowers people in this world...

If you think the politicians and government of this world give you hope, you worship a false god....

Because God is the one who gives hope and security...

Israel is going to ignore this warning from Joshua and fall into idol worship because man is not content with simply trusting in the Lord...

But it isn't because Joshua didn't warn them of such danger...

In fact, he told them to cling to the Lord in verse 8....

What a great picture of faith...

It is clinging to the Lord and not letting go...

And then he gives the reason to obey...

God had done so much for them in clearing the land for them and dividing it up among them....

In fact, God made Israel so feared by the nations that 1 Israelite could drive off 1000 of the inhabitants of the land, according to verse 10...

And then Joshua finishes up this bit of wisdom with a simple command in verse 11...

11 So take diligent heed to yourselves to love the Lord your God.

And that is the essence of what it means to obey God...

Israel was not to follow the law out of a fear of God but due to a love of God....

Love is what drives obedience...

We love God...

We love what he has done for us...

WE love His protection....

WE love that he provides for us...

We love Him, so we obey Him...

And look, Joshua speaks this as a man in his old age...

His heart hasn't hardened to the Lord over the years..

It has continued to soften...

Age should bring wisdom...

Not worldly wisdom of how to get ahead in life or how to make money or how to win friends...

Wisdom that says that we are to love and obey Him with all our heart...

I would remind of Solomon...

A man who has everything...

Money and power and fame, and he used it to experience all that the world had to offer...

Yet when he came to the end of his life and had enjoyed all the things of the world, he came to this conclusion about the meaning of life...

Fear God and keep his commandments...

You see, biblical godly wisdom teaches us to obey the Lord to be blessed...

And Joshua had accumulated a lot of wisdom, and it all could summed up by telling Israel to obey the Lord...

So, age should bring humility and wisdom...

But age should also cause us to warn others...

Look with me at verse 12-13...

III. Age Brings Warning (12-13)

12 For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you [g]associate with them and they with you, 13 know with certainty that the Lord your God will not continue to [h]drive these nations out from before you; but they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you.

As soon as Joshua offers some positive wisdom, he follows it up with negative wisdom...

And this wisdom says to Israel...

Don't follow the pagan nations and peoples of the land...

Specifically, don't allow your daughters to marry their sons and your sons to marry their daughters...

You see, marriage is the closest human relationship.

And both people that enter marriage must have believed in the same God of the Scriptures...

Not only believe in Him but be led by Him...

So many marriages have been devastated because people were married to someone who wasn't a believer in the God of the Bible...

You see, in the days of Joshua, these people of the land were worshippers of many false gods...

And I am sure that the people in Israel believed the same error that many believe today and it is this...

“Well, we will get married and I will win them to the Lord.”

And though that may happen, it is not God's plan for it to occur in that way...

In fact, God forbids marriage to unbelievers...

That was true in 1400 BC and 2017 AD...

To marry someone who isn't a believer is to disobey the Lord, who prohibits those marriages in the Bible...

And Joshua reminds the people as he nears the end of his life about the danger of marrying an unbeliever...

Because this is the pattern...

Marry an unbeliever and the next stage is to follow the false god of the unbeliever...

And Joshua warns Israel that intermarriage with unbelievers will cause God to stop aiding Israel in the remaining conquest of the land...

In fact, intermarriage will lead to their death and the land will be taken out of their hands...

Look, I love this about Joshua....

He has lived long enough to see the danger of people following false gods and marrying unbelievers...

And as he nears the end of his life, he is not shy about telling Israel of danger ahead if they stop following the Lord...

Like a road sign that warns us of a bridge being out, Joshua is warning Israel of not falling off a cliff if they stop clinging to the one true God...

Look, there are older people who get pushy and arrogant about all they have seen and barge into your life to share their wisdom whether you want it or not...

I think calls us to be gentle and gracious as we grow older...

And though we to barge into people's lives with our opinions...

We must be faithful to pass out wisdom and warnings as we grow older...

May God give us wisdom and opportunities to share loving warnings with the next generation as we grow older....

A final example of what age should bring is found in the closing verses of Joshua 23...

IV. Age Brings Perspective (14-16)

As Joshua ends his address to the leaders of Israel, we see his perspective on life...

In other words, we see how Joshua views life and find out what he considers to be important to know and understand about life...

The first thing is that Joshua has the right view of is death...

Look at the opening of verse 14...

14 “Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth,....

As we grow old, we realize that life is short and that everyone on the earth faces the same future, and that future is death...

Joshua had the right perspective....

He is going to die, but there is no fear for those who know and love the Lord...

But Joshua also had the right perspective on the Word of God...

Look at what he said in the middle of verse 14...

and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have [i]been fulfilled for you, not [j]one of them has failed.

One of the reasons that I was drawn to the Master's Seminary was its commitment to teach me how to teach the Word of God...

And all of that starts with John MacArthur...

One thing that struck me about him when I first started listening to Him and reading him was his full-fledged commitment to every word of Scripture...

When I first started listening to him, he had taught the Bible verse by verse for almost 40 years...

And after 40 years of doing it, he was more committed trusting the Word than he was when he started...

He has now celebrated 47 years in the same church, and guess what?

He is still preaching the Word Sunday after Sunday...

And he hasn't abandoned the Word for new fangled methods or silly stunts in the church...

He simply rests in the power of the word of God to accomplish its purpose...

This is the heart of Joshua...

He is 110 years old and at the end of his life, he is telling Israel to trust in the Word of God...

You see, that is so encouraging to me...

To see God's people who are in their years and still preaching about the trustworthiness of the Word of God...

Just a reminder that the Word is true and powerful and sharper than a two edged and it works in the hearts of people....

And there are no greater witnesses of that the heroes of the faith like Joshua...

And a final proper perspective that Joshua has is simply this....

Obedience brings blessings and disobedience brings curses...

Look at verse 15...

15 It shall come about that just as all the good words which the Lord your God spoke to you have come upon you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the threats, until He has destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you. 16 When you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you.”

The general principle of life for Israel was that obeying the Lord would bring good into their lives, while disobeying the Lord would bring harm to them...

Now, that idea wasn't a big secret that Joshua discovered in his old age...

In fact, God told Israel this principle even before they entered the Promised Land...

He went so far as to put them on opposite hills and he said that one hill was the hill of obedience of blessing and the other hill was the hill of disobedience and cursing...

Yet, Israel was not going to take God at his word because they were going to fall into disobedience...

And they were going to get cursing....

So, Joshua isn't giving Israel something new here as he gets close to death...

He has simply lived long enough to see God's principles come true, and he is reminding the nation to stay obedient in order to receive the Lord's blessings.

Conclusion

Let me sum up Joshua 23 with a final thought...

I think we see a lot of Joshua's character as he nears the end of his life...

Though he may be physically unable to lead, he is still mentally sharp and full of godly wisdom..

And he is teaching the things of the Lord up until his last breath..

You don't see selfish and bitterness at the point of death but gratitude and hope and a desire to lead others to obey the Lord..

Reminds me of Paul in the NT...

As he neared death, he was still writing and encouraging Timothy in his final letter to him...

You see this is the character of those who love the Lord..

Even at death, there is no room for pride but only more humility and a desire to see others follow the Lord...

As we have seen Joshua's final words, let me end with Paul's final words as he teaches Timothy....

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with [a]great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

How do you fight the good fight and finish the race well?

You grow old and you leave this world pointing others to the Lord in all you say and do...

Let us pray.