

Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, February 17, 2008
Joshua 23
"God's Way To Lead"

All morning, an instructor had been explaining leadership to a class of police recruits.

Calling a man to the front of the class, he handed him a piece of paper on which was written: "You are in charge. Get everyone out of the room without causing a panic."

The recruit was at a loss for words and returned to his seat.

The second man summoned tried: "Everybody outside. Go!" No one moved.

A third man glanced at the instructions, smiled and said, "All right, men. Break for lunch." The room emptied in seconds.

That third man knew something about leadership, didn't he?

Then there is the other side of the coin.

As a train was about to leave a large railroad station, the conductor began to take tickets. Looking at the ticket of the first passenger he remarked, "Friend, I think you're on the wrong train!" "But," replied the man, "the ticket agent told me this was my train."

After a little discussion, the conductor decided to check with the ticket agent. Before long, it became clear that the conductor was on the wrong train!

When the leader is lost, how can the followers be going on the right track.

Good leadership is certainly essential for staying on the right track and accomplishing the goals necessary for any organized group, nation, church, family, yes, individual to have success or for a task to be accomplished.

That's why when we come to our text in Joshua 23 we find Joshua, who has been a sterling leader of the nation of Israel for at least 25 years, and now coming to the end of his life, calling for whom??

Note our Text, Joshua 23: 2 – "That Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders and their heads, and their judges, and their officers, and said to them . . ."

Who are these that Joshua calls together as he comes to the end of his life? Joshua calls for the leaders of the nation. Joshua has something to say to them first of all because he knows as the leadership goes in the nation of Israel, so goes the nation.

Before we look at what Joshua said to the various leaders of the nation of Israel, we need to keep in mind that Joshua was a seasoned veteran leader of the nation Israel. In his 25 years of leading the nation of Israel, he has experienced victory and defeat. He has seen God's power at work through him and his people. He has also seen spiritual complacency and apathy in people's lives. As a leader of Israel, Joshua has also experienced the love, grace, and holiness of the true and living God.

What does this veteran leader have to say who has walked with the LORD even under Moses' leadership for some 40 years before taking over the number 1 position of being the leader of the 2 ½ million people that makeup the nation of Israel? Yes, what does Joshua at the end of his amazing career have to say to those who will be carrying on in positions of leadership after he has gone to be with the LORD.

I. A reliance on God's character is foremost and essential for successful leadership (Joshua 23:3-5).

Look at what Joshua tells his leadership about the God he and many of them have been serving for the past 25 years.

1. God is faithful to His word (Joshua 23:3-5).

(1) God has been faithful in the past (23:3-4)

"And you have seen all that the LORD has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has been fighting for you. 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."

In this statement, Joshua is reminding the leaders of Israel that it is God who has brought the nation to this point. Through the 25 years of crossing the Jordan on dry ground, of taking Jericho, AI, and the other cities of Canaan, along with central, southern, and northern Canaan, God has kept His Word. The various tribes have received the land promised to them. God has been faithful. What God has said has come to pass.

These leaders would certainly be able to relate to all that God had done for them under the leadership of Joshua. They would remember how God had intervened on their behalf. They would not have forgotten their history. If the leaders had been quizzed on what God did at Jericho, they would have known what had happened, as God miraculously intervened.

Such though in our day is not always the case.

The new pastor decided to visit the children's Sunday school. The teacher introduced him and said, "Pastor, this morning we're studying Joshua."

"That's wonderful," said the new pastor, "let's see what you're learning. Who tore down the walls of Jericho?"

Little Billy shyly raised hand and offered, "Pastor, I didn't do it."

Taken aback, the pastor asked, "Come on, now, who tore down the walls of Jericho?"

The teacher, interrupting, said, "Pastor, Billy's a good boy. If he says he didn't do it, I believe he didn't do it."

Flustered, the pastor went to the Sunday school director and related the story to him.

The director, looking worried, explained, "Well, sir, we've had some problems with Billy before. Let me talk to him and see what we can do."

Really bothered now by the answers of the teacher and the director, the new pastor approached the deacons and related the whole story, including the responses of the teacher and the director.

A white-haired gentleman thoughtfully stroked his chin and said, "Well, Pastor, I move we just take the money from the general fund to pay for the walls and leave it at that."

Joshua was saying that God had acted in history, for He had. Joshua was there, and the various leaders of Israel were there. The written account of the event is accurate and dependable. "Great is the LORD's faithfulness," Joshua tells the leaders of Israel as he comes to the end of his life. The God of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. He is involved with His people day and night. He has never let His people down. God has been faithful in the past.

(2) God's faithfulness in the past guarantees God's faithfulness in the present and future (23:5).

Note Joshua 23:5 – "The LORD your God, He shall thrust them out from before you and drive them from before you; and you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you."

The various tribes of Israel had been apportioned their land by Joshua. They had moved into their specific areas of real estate, but there was still work for them to do. It was up to each tribe to take completely the property from the enemy in order to take the land entirely that was theirs. **On what basis would this take place? The faithfulness of God in His word. His promise was what each the leaders in the various tribes must rely upon.**

God was faithful in the past. He would also be faithful in the present and the future as the tribes relied on His faithful character and promise.

But there was another aspect of the Lord's character that the leaders of Israel must rely upon in their areas of responsibility.

2. God is truth.

Faithfulness deals with God keeping His promises, but God is also truth, that is He can never be false in any of His promises He has made. God is truth means that we can always rely on His faithfulness.

That's why Joshua tells the leaders here that they have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all the nations because of you (23:3). I'm sure that the leaders remember what Joshua told them as they were about to come into the promised land. "Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess it" (Joshua 1:11).

Since the biblical God is truth, He can never go back on His Word and the promises in His Word. God can not lie. He is truth. God knows no falsehood, does not deceive, nor stretch or bend the truth. That's why our Lord declared that He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

Satan of course is just the opposite. There is no truth in him (John 8:44). Satan can pose as an angel of light, but he can only be a counterfeit. He is the deceiver, thief, and robber, yes, a murderer. He is a liar and the father of it.

But God is true. He is faithful to His Word and to His promises. They are totally dependable.

Joshua tells his leaders that they must always remember that God is faithful because He is the God of truth.

Then Joshua adds another characteristic of the biblical God that leaders must rely upon.

3. God's omnipotence is always available to them (22:3, 4-5).

Note again Joshua's words in 22:3 "The LORD your God is He who has been fighting for you." Then, Joshua 23: 4 "See, I have apportioned to you these nations. . . . which I have cut off." In addition, Joshua 23:5, "The LORD your God, He shall thrust them out from before you and drive them from before you . . ."

Israel could only have entered the land of Canaan through God's miraculous power. They couldn't have crossed the Jordan River on dry ground without the supernatural power of the living and true biblical God. They couldn't have taken Jericho without losing an individual without God's miraculous omnipotence, His Almighty power.

God told Israel in Deuteronomy 8:18 that "You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth. . ." In 8:16 of Deuteronomy God tells the nation that He fed them manna in the wilderness.

Yes, God fought for Israel, God thrust out the enemy, and He drove out the enemies of Israel.

Joshua tells the leaders, as he comes to the end of His incredible military career and the leader of the nation of Israel, that they must rely on God's miraculous power as they continue their responsibilities as leaders of the nation.

Then Joshua tells the leaders that. . . .

4. God's pure love was and is always committed to them (22:3, 4, 5).

Note the words in Joshua 22:3, "Because of you," And the words, "fighting for you," in Joshua 22:3. Joshua 23:4, "I have apportioned for you."

Joshua 23:5, "He (the LORD) shall thrust them out before you."

What is the LORD saying through Joshua to the other leaders?

God's life is bound up in yours. God's loves you dearly and everlastingly.

In Deuteronomy 7:7, God told the nation of Israel, "The LORD did not set his love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because He loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers."

God loved Israel with an everlasting love (and God still does today) not because He needed them, but He loved them because of His compassion and grace. God was totally committed to the nation of Israel.

God's love for Israel moved Him to be faithful, true, and use His power for His glory and to further His plan for His people.

What a leader of depth this veteran servant of the biblical God is.

As he comes to the end of his life, and gives his final address to the leaders of Israel, Joshua never mentions himself. He doesn't say, "Look what I have told you." OR "Look what I have done." OR "Look what you have learned from me."

Rather, Joshua points his leaders to the **SOURCE** of all that has happened in his some 25 years of his service to Jehovah God. Joshua recognized that he was just a clay pot in the Potter's hand. If there was any glory to be gotten, only ONE receives the glory, the LORD God Himself.

If Joshua would have known the song, "To God Be The Glory," I'm sure that he would have sung that song with great enthusiasm and joy.

Or perhaps if Joshua had known, "O LORD, our LORD, how excellent is Your Name in all the earth," he would have been singing that with great gusto.

Joshua, as he ends his incredible career as the leader of Israel, points his leaders to the CAPTAIN of the LORD's Armies, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Joshua takes no credit for what happened in the life of Israel conquering the promised land.

I'm sure we have all seen situations where men start letting their position of leadership cause them to think that they are even above God. God doesn't let that kind of leadership last long as evidenced in our country at different times. Soon, their leadership comes tumbling down for their sin finds them out.

All of us in positions of leadership in the church, fathers who are leaders in the home, and others who are leaders, for leadership is actually influence, and all of us are influencing other people, need to keep our focus on God's character as we serve the Lord and others. We must never become the fan of a man. Some become so involved in certain leaders that they lose their ability to be the individual God wants them to be. We can learn from others, but the Lord Jesus Christ is the one we should emulate in our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit, as we serve Him.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate leader who is faithful, true, all-powerful and loves us with an everlasting love. We need to listen to His voice in the Word of God and follow Him in the Spirit's power.

As Joshua gives his farewell address to his leaders, he knows that God's character must be relied upon always for a leader to be the leader God wants him to be.

But Joshua also knows that the character of the true and living biblical God must have a direct and definite affect on the life of a leader.

That's why Joshua moves from the LORD's character to the Leader's Commitment.

II. The Lord's character must have a lasting effect on the leader's commitment to Him. (Joshua 23:6-13).

Note Joshua 23:6, "Be very firm, then. . . ."

The first effect that the Lord's character will have on a leader's commitment to the LORD is . .

1. Be Steadfast in the Lord in one's daily life (23:6a).

The word, firmness, means to be very strong – have staying power - to be steadfast, to not be swayed about by the thinking and philosophy of men. It means for us today that one's commitment to Christ as Savior and Lord is a living dynamic relationship which is a daily experience. It means that the leader knows that Jesus Christ is the eternal foundation for his or her life.

That's why Paul told the Corinthians to be steadfast, (settled, constant) immovable (firm) always abounding in the work of the Lord, know that your toil is not in vain in the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58).

For such to happen, the believer's life must be in tune with the Holy Spirit who produces the character of Christ through him or her as the believer obeys the Holy Spirit as revealed in the Word of God.

Consider what Joshua just talked about to his leaders concerning the character of God.

****God's faithfulness** – Is God's faithfulness at work in my life and your life as a leader in the church, as a leader in the home to your wife, to your husband, and to your family, or as you have influence on others where God puts us. Is my life characterized by integrity.

****God's truth** – Are we honest in our relationships? Are we trustworthy?

****God's power** – Is there evidence in my life that I am trusting in God to accomplish His purpose through me in what I think, say, and do? Do I have a life of prayer that is trusting God to work where I can not work? The power of God is not necessarily seeing some phenomenal happen, but the staying power of God when the chips are down and there seems to be no light in the tunnel as yet.

**** God's love** – Is it apparent in our lives as leaders that God's love is active in our thoughts, words, and actions? Do we see the God's positive viewpoint in negative situations, or do we always see the negative? Are we people of hope and of vision?

D.L. Moody used to say, "Character is what you are in the dark."

God's character show keep the leader firm, steadfast, with staying power because he or she is rooted in the eternal soil of the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The second effect the character of God will have on a leader's commitment to the Lord is . . .

2. Be Obedient to the Word of God (23:6b).

Joshua uses two words here, "keep," and "do" all that is written in the book of the law of Moses. (1) Keep means to observe or to guard and take care of.

Although the priests were to teach the law of Moses, it would seem here that Joshua is exhorting the leaders in his day to make sure that their lives were continually involved . . .

In learning what the Word of God said – Know what God's word said.

In upholding God's Word as truth – making sure that God's word is always held to as the Truth.

In the days of Joshua, the law of Moses would contain the first five books of the Bible. Today we have the completed Word of God in 66 books. Leaders, and all of us who have an influence on others, I trust that we are daily in the Word of God to find out what it is saying to us. At the same time I trust we uphold the Word of God as truth, and seek to make it applicable to our lives and the issues that are at the forefront of our culture today.

Leaders in the church should set the example of being in the Word of God and they are held responsible for seeing that the local church upholds God's Word as being truth. Fathers, I believe we have the same responsibility in the home. All of us have that responsibility in our individual lives.

Not only are leaders to keep, guard and uphold the Word of God, leaders are to . . .

(2) Do all that the law says (23:6c).

Character always leads to conduct. In fact, conduct shows one's character. That's why Solomon told us that a good reputation is better than riches.

Certainly those in leadership must set the example for conduct, which is what Joshua is telling his leaders in our text.

Of course, knowledge of the Word of God doesn't guarantee conduct.

I remember Dr. Bruce Waltke, telling of his friend who didn't know Christ personally. His friend memorized the entire Book of Psalms in the Hebrew Scriptures, and could recite it in two hours. But he never received the full spiritual impact. It was just a mechanical exercise.

It's easy to do that whether in a position of leadership or just in a place of influence.

The question is to us as leaders, and to all of us today is, "Are we continuing to grow in Christ, becoming more like Him?"

Someone suggested that we ought to dress on Sunday morning according to our spiritual maturity in Christ. How many might be walking around the church in rompers, waving a rattle, cooing, explaining their newly discovered toes. How many would be dressed in rather youthful attire, and how many would be dressed in adult attire?

Interesting to think about, in the light of spiritual maturity, isn't it?

James gives us the exhortation that we ought not just to be hearers of the Word of God, glancers at the Word of God, but that we ought to be gazers into the Word of God, learning and doing what the Word of God is telling us to do.

(3) Results of keeping and doing (23:6b-7).

"So that you may not turn aside from it to the aright hand or to the left, in order that you may not 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."

Two results come from keeping and doing God's Word.

1. Leaders are kept on the straight and narrow road that leads to heaven (23:6 b; cf Joshua 1:7).

Joshua had remembered and kept the words of the LORD to him in Joshua 1:7 at his commissioning, which told Joshua that the Law of Moses was given so that he would not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go.

Joshua had not forgotten God's Word that said that there are two ways in life, which he states again here -- the way of God and the way of man and satan. Psalm 1 teaches the same thing. Jesus gave the same teaching -- narrow is the gate that leads to life eternal, and broad is the gate and way that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

God gives us His Word to keep leaders and all of us on the straight and narrow way that leads to eternal life, to keep us focused on who we are serving, the LORD, and what we are doing here, accomplishing His will, and where we are going, into His presence some day.

The word of God is profitable for teaching, reproof, what to put off of our spiritual lives, for correction – what to put on in one’s spiritual life, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God will be adequate, equipped for every good work (II Timothy 3:16).

When there is a deviation in any form from what the Bible teaches, false doctrine results and false practice results –meaning spiritual discipline is no longer necessary.

Then Joshua adds. . .

2. Leaders are given discernment into determining what is against the Lord and His Word and what is for the Lord and His Word.

The law of Moses was clear that Israel should not become involved with the other pagan nations’ religion. That’s why the people were to be destroyed. To become involved in pagan gods would be breaking the first commandment of being involved in idolatry. That’s why in Deuteronomy 7 God is clear that Israel should not make any kind of a covenant with the other nations or intermarry with them, for the other nations would turn their hearts away from the true and living God and they would start worshipping their man-made gods which is idolatry.

Sad to say that is what eventually happened to the nation of Israel? Why? The leadership of Israel did not take the initiative and maintain the discernment that God’s Word provides.

Yes, it’s possible today to mix the teachings of Christ and the thinking of the world, and become involved in idolatry. In fact, it has already happened in some groups, and some are flirting today with mixing the Bible’s teachings with man’s ideas. It can only lead to total confusion and delusion.

Only an adherence to the Word of God, as written, will give the discernment that leaders and all of us need into what is happening in the religious world today, in the cultural world today, in the political and economic world today, and in the family.

But Joshua is not finished yet. The heart of the leader has more instruction for his leaders.

Joshua continues talking about how God’s character must affect the leader’s commitment to His Lord. He had said that there must be steadfastness in the Lord, and obedience to the Word of God. Now Joshua continues . . . Leaders are to thirdly,

3. Give full allegiance to the Lord (Joshua 23:8-11).

“But you are to cling to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.”

Full allegiance to the Lord means . . .

(1) Cling to the LORD your God (23:8-9).

The King James here reads, cleave, to the LORD. The word is used in Genesis 2:24 where it says that man shall cleave to his wife. The word, cleave, means that Adam and Eve’s relationship would be a separation proof relationship. Nothing could break that relationship except death.

In Joshua 23:8, the word means to keep adhering to the LORD your God. Yes, the LORD loves you eternally, but you must take the initiative to keep Him first in your life. You can’t serve two masters. You will either love the one and hate the other. So cleave to the LORD because He loves you. He has shown you how great He is by driving out the great and strong nations (23:9).

(2) Love the LORD your God (23:10-11).

Joshua is saying to his leaders, “Give the LORD your heart, give Him your mind, your will, and your emotion. Give Him your entire self. Give Him your worship, develop an on-going relationship with this one who is your salvation, who has fought for you just as He had promised.”

Moody says this about His commitment to God's love, "I got full of it. It ran out my fingers. You take up the subject of love in the Bible, you will get so full of it that all you have got to do is open your lips, and a flood of the love of God flows out of it.

Leaders and each of us should test our love for God by asking the next time we think of someone or do something, "Will this please the Lord that I love and serve?"

In his farewell address to his leaders, Joshua adds one note of caution.

Joshua has talked about God's character and how God's character should affect a leader's commitment to the Lord, but being the honest leader that he is, Joshua talks about consequences.

III. When God's character doesn't affect the leader's commitment to the Lord, dire consequences can result (Joshua 23:12-16).

"If you ever go back and cling (adhere) to the rest of these nations God will not drive out these nations, but they shall be a trap for you 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. . . . then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you (23:12-13,16).

What's Joshua saying to the leaders?

Don't compromise the character of God in your commitment to Him. Don't honor man. Don't mix with the ungodly nations still in the land, so that you start worshipping their gods, being guilty of idolatry.

If you do four things will happen.

1. God's judgment in His wrath will come upon the nation of Israel (22:16).
2. Israel will be entrapped by the pagan nations mixed with (22:13).
3. Israel will eventually be removed from the land God gave them (22:13, 15, 16).
4. You will no longer be in God's place of blessing.

These are solemn words that Joshua gives to his leaders as he comes to the end of his life. He is reminding them of the high privilege and responsibility that they have as leaders in the nation of Israel. When the Lord and His word is not followed, the leader loses his position of leadership.

You can see Joshua's heart for God here and for his leaders in Joshua 23:14 – "Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, 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 been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed.

Indeed, Joshua is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ as he faithfully served the Lord all these years.

Joshua wants them to know that since God has been faithful to them, they must be faithful to HIM!!

How did the leaders of Israel fare? Did they follow through on their leader, Joshua's instructions, to be faithful to the LORD who was faithful to them?

Isaiah prophesying from about 740- 680 B.C. was telling the rulers that they were rebels, compromisers and thieves. In the time of Micah around 700 B. C., he was pronouncing judgment on the rulers for their injustice and false prophecies. Both the northern kingdoms and southern kingdoms were taken into captivity because of their going after the gods of the pagan nations.

Israel's leaders lost their position of leadership, and Israel was no longer a witness to the world of God's purity, love, and power. Eventually, when the Lord returns at the end of the tribulation period, Israel's leaders will be restored and the nation's rightful place of leadership in the world as a nation. Christ will be the nation's King and He will provide the ultimate leadership that Israel needs.

But where the good king reigned there was righteousness. Where the bad king reigned there was unrighteousness.

Joshua knew that the character of God must directly affect the commitment of the leader to the Lord. If God's character of faithfulness, truth, power, and love didn't continually change the life of the leader to follow God's Word, drastic consequences would result.

In the full revelation of the Bible, the character of Jesus Christ is what affects our lives as leaders, as people of influence today.

It's only through the cross of Jesus Christ that we find salvation through faith in Him, and in His power we can serve Him in positions of leadership today and influence others as we have the opportunity.

The principles that Joshua gave in 1400 B.C. are still relevant for us today for the Word of God lives and abides forever.

I. A reliance on God's character is foremost and essential for successful leadership (Joshua 23:3-5).

Faithfulness, truth, power, love

II. The Lord's character must have a lasting effect on the leader's commitment to Him. (Joshua 23:6-13).

Steadfastness in the Lord, Take care of and obey the Word of God, full allegiance to the Lord.

III. When God's character doesn't affect the leader's commitment to the Lord, dire consequences can result (Joshua 23:12-16).

God's discipline, removal from leadership, and restoration in God's time.

Perhaps this closing story puts God's kind of leadership into His perspective.

Cal Thomas found himself called a "Christian leader" by a leading Christian magazine and he wondered what that meant. More speaking engagements? Perhaps an appearance on a Christian talk show? "It would certainly give me the right to start putting Scripture references under my signed name in books I have written. I would surely sign more Bibles, which I find a curious practice since I didn't write that Book."

Thomas wonders if we have reversed things. God's strength is made perfect in weakness.

"In a church I once attended, there was a man of tremendous faith. His wife is an alcoholic, His daughter has psychological problems. He was often poor in health. Yet, week after week, he never complained. He always smiled and asked me how I was doing. He faithfully brought to church a young blind man who had no transportation. He always sat with the blind man, helping him sing the hymns by saying the words into his ear. That man was a 'Christian leader' if ever there was one."

Indeed, God's way to lead is by servant leadership in His power for His glory!