

August 7, 2005

The Book of Joshua

Having finished an express trip through the five Books of Moses we turn the page to the Book of Joshua. In its pages we find the realization of the dreams of the children of Abraham. We read of events that have little meaning unless they contain a message for us this day

The book opens with these words attributed to Yahweh: *“Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people into the land which I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.”*

This Promised Land inhabited by Canaanites and known to us as Palestine was ripe for the taking. Canaan

was made up of a handful of city-states, each ruled by a king. These cities were under the protection of Egypt. But preoccupied by its own internal problems Egypt had withdrawn its military support. The vacuum caused by this withdrawal was filled with continuing warfare between these little kingdoms. This warfare left the area in chaos. Bands of discontented people roamed the hills of central Canaan raiding towns and villages and keeping the people in turmoil, uneasy, uncertain.

Like the area, Canaan's social structure was unstable. It consisted of a small land owning upper class and a landless semi-slave lower class. While Joshua may not have known it as he camped on the plains of Moab beside the River Jordan the law of the evolution of people was about to play an important part in his plans. *"Silk*

slippers coming down the stairs; wooden clogs climbing up the stairs.”

The Book of Joshua is a history of Israel’s entry into Canaan. By the time Joshua was called to his Maker, Israel had gained a foothold in Galilee and could claim control of the major portion of Canaan’s central hills.

Facing death Joshua, like his predecessor Moses, called the people together at Sheham and instructed them:

“Therefore be very steadfast to keep and do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand or to the left, that yea may not be mixed with these nations left here among you, or make mention of the names of their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or bow down yourself to them, but cleave to the Lord your God as you have done to this day.”

Joshua was the last of his generation. The last of those who had been with Moses when the people of Israel

were consigned to wander in the Wilderness until those over twenty had died off. About the year 1250 Joshua was called upon to lead the second generation of the Exodus across the River Jordan into the Promised Land. His job done he died at the age of 110.

Joshua's battle for the land promised to the Jews began with doubt, the doubt expressed by his fellow spies that the Jews could not overcome the Canaanites and possess the land. Now that they had done just that Joshua leaves them with this legacy, *"Therefore be very steadfast to keep and do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses turning neither to the left or right."*

So what does this life of Joshua say to us as we occupy this affluent land of ours some 3,000 or so years later? I read of the doubt that led the children of Israel into the

desert and the faith that led Joshua and his group into Canaan. What is it telling me? When I compare Joshua's experience with the doubt, discouragement, and despair that is prevalent in our world I am brought to the words of Jesus as he talked to his disciples during his last days. Luke tells us that Jesus told these followers of his that would soon witness his crucifixion, ***“Hold out steadfast and you will win your souls.”*** Dr. Phillip's translation puts it this way, ***“Hold on, and you will win your souls.”***

As he faced his disciples with these words Jesus knew that these men would never see that they would make a dent in the evil that infested their society. Today we can look back and see that these frail and humble men would change the whole course of human history and the world would be forever different, ever better.

This change wasn't an overnight thing. These men could only do this by patience and holding on. The same was true of the children of Israel as they wandered through the Wilderness. They could only realize the dream of possessing their own land by holding on. That was the message that Joshua left them. ***“They could only enjoy the fruits of their military victories by holding on to that which got them there, i.e. faith.”***

Life is forever a battle. At times it seems that all of the cards are stacked against us, there is no way we can win. And while we may lose the battle without we can still win that all important battle within. It is in that battle for the man inside that we find the life we were created to live, the victory we were created to win. The battle for moral character is a struggle with the temptation and the

weakness is that humanity is heir to. Tempted, as one holds on to one's moral standards, one wins the battle for one's soul. Unless there are those among us who hold fast to possess our own souls we can never have a better world. To have that better world there must be people who will hold on to an ideal and will not yield. Ours is an imperfect world and there is so much that needs to be done to straighten it out. It is in this imperfection that surrounds us that calls on us to believe that our Christian faith, under God, can make it over. It calls us to possess our own souls and that is not an easy task.

Doubt, discouragement, despair, seek to overcome our battles for the man inside. It need not be. There are things that will help us to hold on. One is the faith in the triumph of truth. Truth is a powerful weapon in the battle

of life. Its power will overcome error and falsehood.

Righteousness will prevail in the end. By righteousness I mean, *“right conduct.”* It is discouraging to see righteousness shot down on every side, but it will prevail in the end. Our task is to see that it prevails in our life.

I get discouraged when I look at the nightly Fox News Channel. *“God how can you let this be? Why don’t you just blot out humanity entirely and start afresh?”*

It is times like these that call for us to believe that there is enough responsiveness to truth and righteousness in the hearts of enough people to slowly but surely bring in the more perfect reign of truth and righteousness. Out of our discouragement shines the light of the truth that

God put a part of himself in this we call humanity. This is something that God will not allow to perish. No wonder Joshua left his people with a message of victory, that they walk in the way of the Lord. No wonder Christ told his followers, *“Hold on! You will win your soul.”*

Ours is a responsibility to stand for those ideals that are high and noble and true. While it may not seem like it, as we possess our own souls we are bringing into being a better world.

The Book of Joshua is a history of Israel’s conquest and establishment in Canaan. Today it is also a challenge to live a life that will advance God’s creation that his kingdom will become a closer reality in our world.

Pastor's Message

It is the glory of youth to project life and plans for living into the far horizons of the future and even to be restless with the seeming slowness of the passing of the years. Youth hurries forth to meet the future. This is as it should be. Only pity for the young person who is not enchanted with the distant view.

It is the wisdom of age to learn to measure life in terms of days instead of years. The older one advances in age the more acute becomes the problem of "What shall I do with today?"

While planning for days instead of years may at first seem menial and unworthy of one with great talents, it perhaps requires more thought and genius and certainly more patience.

There are many comforts and consolations which come with having to plan only for days instead of years. For one thing, the load of the feeling of responsibility for the long future is lifted. The battles of life are reduced from campaign proportions to skirmishes. Time does not permit employment in long adventures nor is there the desire to go forth in search of pastures new. One clings to the old and the familiar.

While the query of Shaw "What is life but a series of inspired follies?" cannot be answered with a categorical affirmative, the thoughtful man of maturity is conscious of the fact too much of the best of lives consisted of follies both inspired and uninspired.

PRAYER

O God, give me insight and strength when I must plan for the years and ingenuity and patience when I must plan for the days. Amen.