

Joshua 23

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 0 0] Good evening. A warm welcome to the service this evening. The information you have on the sheets before you and they've been on the screens. Again, let me just remind you of a couple of things. One is the meeting tomorrow night in Tallinn Amara. Being a Christian in the Scottish Parliament, Kate Forbes MSP is going to be speaking about her faith and her faith within the political environment. So it's a meeting that I would encourage as many of us as possible to go to. And I think there's the chance to ask questions of Kate as well. So it would be good to get the chance to do so. So that's tomorrow evening at Tallinn Amara at half past seven. And the rest of the things you can see there in the notice sheet and I'll leave you to read them at your own convenience. Also just to say that the services next Lord's Day will be taken by the Reverend Roddy Morrison. I'm hopefully going to be at Greyfriars, Pre-Church in Inverness where Malcolm McLean is the minister doing the communion services over that weekend. So I would value your prayers. I'm preaching on Friday and Saturday and Sunday as well. And then we hope to be on holiday for the week afterwards. And if there are any issues that come up for us when we're on holiday, speak to any of the elders and

Roddy Morrison also is going to be on standby and will be available for any past or things in the course of that week when I'm away. So the rest of the information I'll let you read at your own convenience.

Thank you. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the fact that we can know you, that you are a God who calls us to come to you and enter into relationship with you. And we thank you that the way into relationship with you has been made possible and through Christ. We thank you for the good news about Jesus that was told to us, perhaps even in camps and through youth leaders in Sunday school and YF and in different ventures in times past. We thank you for those who shared the gospel message with us, who prayed for us, who came alongside us when we were in our younger years. And we thank you, Lord, for the work of these camps that Donald has spoken of this evening. We thank you for these 400 children that we anticipate being at camps over these summer weeks. What potential, Lord, there is for them hearing the gospel and for lives being changed and for your name to be glorified. And we pray into that and we ask,

Lord, that you would be at work, that you would fill these camps, that you would draw people to respond to the invitation, that you would provide the means, Lord, for people to be able to afford to come and to come, that you would create a desire in the hearts of the young people to come and to learn more about Jesus. And even where there is not a desire to come and know about Christ, but there may be a desire to play football or shinty or whatever, we ask that some young people go with a different motivation, but then encounter Christ, that you may touch their hearts, Lord, and that you may change lives. So we pray for this work and we ask, Lord, that you would be opening the hearts of the children that have been set aside to go to these camps. We ask, Father, that you would work in advance, that you would work during, and that you would work after, that the gospel message would be shared simply and clearly and powerfully with words that the witness of Christ would be seen in the leaders. And we ask that those who are not Christians in these weeks would come to know Christ. And Lord, that those who do know Christ would come to know

Christ better and become more like him. We ask that there would be leaders in place for all these camps also, and that all the details that are necessary to be fulfilled in advance of them would be fulfilled so that this mission could progress. So hear our prayers for these camps, Lord, and help us.

[4 : 19] We ask that if there's anybody here that you may be putting your hand upon to go to a camp or to lead a camp, to use their time and their skills to be involved in this, that you would make that clear to them and open doors for them in the future months. And be with Donald. We thank you for him, for his dedication to the job that you have given him here. And we ask that you would give him wisdom and perseverance in all that he is called to do at this time. So hear our prayers and continue with us, we ask, and we ask all in Jesus' name. Amen.

Joshua chapter 23. And we find Joshua here at the end of his days. After a long time had passed, and the Lord had given rest, Israel rest from all the enemies around them. Verse 1, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years, summoned all Israel, their elders, leaders, judges, and officials, and said to them, I am old and well advanced in years. You have seen the everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake. And he goes on, and we spent time, yes, last Sunday evening, looking at the first part of this speech. And then Joshua comes to the end of the speech and really brings things towards a summary in verse 14. And we'll look at just that last section this evening. Joshua says in verse 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. That just as every good promise of the Lord your God has come true, so the Lord will bring on you all the evil he has threatened until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. 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. And that brings us to the end of Joshua's speech there and the end of our reading. So may God bless that reading of his word to us. We'll sing.

Let's pray as we turn back to Joshua 23.

Our Heavenly Father, we would pray as we have sung that we may come to know you through this sacred book that you have inspired by the Holy Spirit. God through himself we then shall know if thou within us shine. And Lord that's what we pray for. We pray that we would come to know you this evening if we do not yet know you as our Saviour and our Lord. That we would come to know you as our Father Lord if we have not yet felt the love of the Father. Lord that we would know the reality of the Holy Spirit within us if we have never yet come to experience that. And if we have experienced that already, if we are yours Lord, we pray that we would come to know you better through your word this evening. So be at work we pray. We recognize that we cannot do this ourselves. We need the Holy Spirit, God himself, to be our teacher. And so we ask Lord that you would send the Holy Spirit so that we would be guided in our thinking, in our speaking, in our responses in a way that will bring glory to your name. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want to start this evening by asking the question, do you know where you're going? Do you know where you're going? It's a question that comes to us all. And it comes to us all in different forms and at different times within our lives. It comes with a different emphasis and different context. Some of our teenagers have been asked the question just now, do you know where you're going? As they have subjects in front of them and they're being asked to make choices, they're they're being asked the question in terms of education, do you have any direction? Do you know where you're going? Those who are in the working world or who are in the working world in days gone past, we can think of times in the past where we've sat down with supervisors and colleagues and we've been asked to talk about our ambitions and our plans and our hopes. And we're asked in terms of our working environment, do you know where you're going?

[9 : 24] Even at a national level, as we switch on our news night after night, we know the headline, we know the substance of the vast majority of the news that's coming our way. We hear endless debates about Brexit and the pros and the cons and the possibilities and the risks and the politicians are asking each other and we're asking the politicians, do you know which way we are going?

And Joshua at this point in his life, he knows where he's going. And that takes us to our first point. Our first point is simply the way.

Look at verse 14. Joshua says, as he begins to bring his speech to conclusion here, he says, Now I am about to go the way of all the earth.

You know, it's a strange phrase to our ears. I can't ever recall somebody using it in conversation, but Joshua says here, Now I am about to go the way of all the earth.

Now what does that mean? Well it means he's about to die. And he has an awareness of that fact. He knows that he is going to die.

[10 : 45] He's lived for many years. We said last week he was likely up in his 90s by this stage. He says in verse 2, I am old and well advanced in years.

And he knows that his time in this world is coming to an end. He's facing death. And he's facing up to the reality of death. David spoke in a similar manner, an identical manner actually, in 1 Kings 2.

It says there in verse 1, when the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon, his son. I am about to go the way of all the earth, he said.

So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires. Walk in his ways, keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go.

And it's got a similar tone to it, as we hear in Joshua's speech. Two men coming to the end of their lives. And they know it. They are about to go the way of all the earth.

[12 : 00] When you're young, you don't think much about that. Increasingly, I think, actually, as we listen to people when they're old even.

They don't think much about that. We're living in a culture now that is very much resistant to thinking about the reality of the fact that we have to go the way of all the earth.

Not part of the earth, but all of the earth. Just thinking back to my teenage years and some of the lyrics of some of the popular songs.

One was, we're so young and invincible. Another was, you and I are going to live forever. And that's very much an anthem of youth.

That's very often how we feel when we're in our teenage years, when we're in our early years, even into our twenties. We feel so young, we feel like we've got all of life ahead of us.

[13 : 04] We feel so invincible. We feel all these possibilities are ahead of us, but we know, surely, that we're not going to live forever. We may sing about it.

We may sell records. But it's not true. Some of us may become old and well advanced in years.

Some of us may not. I came from Harris House this afternoon. A week ago at this time, I had just been in for a conversation in a time of prayer with old Roddy.

He was well on in years. He was advanced in years. He was older. But a man who was in his Bible, a man who was trusting in the Lord. Today's room is empty.

He's gone from time into eternity. He was old and well advanced in years and now he has gone the way of all the earth.

[14 : 09] We can think even to midweek on that tragic account of a lady in her middle years. And one moment she's enjoying life on the beach in Nishabost and the next moment almost she's been swept from time into eternity.

None of us know the timing but you and I know that we will go the way of all the earth. the Bible makes that very clear.

Ecclesiastes chapter 3 verses 1 and 2 there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the sun. A time to be born and a time to die.

Hebrews 9 27 it is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgment and Joshua teaches us to be aware of that and to be thoughtful in regard to these things to be ready for the time when we will go the way of all the earth.

Not one of us will not travel down this way. We will all go the way of all the earth. We have no continuing city here.

[15 : 47] We did in Hebrews. James chapter 4 verse 14 James says what is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

And we need to see that. We need to be realistic about that in order that we will be ready to go that way.

Are you ready this evening to go the way of all the earth? We don't know the timing.

But are you and I ready to go that way that we will certainly travel? Joshua is somebody who clearly was ready and he wanted the people that he loved and that he had led through time to be ready for that crossing over from time into eternity.

so he goes from speaking about the way to speaking about the truth. It's the second point. Sometimes when people are telling us the truth with regards to serious things they'll say well there's good news and there's bad news and if we want the truth the whole truth the accurate truth we need to hear both.

[17 : 19] we want the truth well we can't say to the doctor well give me the good news but I don't want to hear the bad news. We're going to a school evening for our reports to come back we can't say well let me hear what the teachers have got to say about the good things but I don't want to hear anything about the bad things.

If we want the truth then we need the whole truth and Joshua he speaks to them the whole truth here. He speaks in terms of good news and he speaks in terms of bad news.

He speaks to them about how they as they look forward can know God's blessing and peace. It's the good news. And he also speaks to them about how they looking forward can avoid God's punishment and judgment.

That's the bad news. So first of all the good news. And Joshua says here still in verse 14 I think 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. And that was the good news. It was about God and his character and his work.

[18 : 42] work. That's actually the message of Joshua. You want the central overwhelming clear message of this book.

It's the fact that God is faithful. He is trustworthy. And what he promises he will never fail to do.

That was the good news and that remains this evening the good news for us. we look at each other and we trust each other but only in degrees.

We look in the mirror. We can only trust the person that we see looking back in degrees. We may say things, we may mean them, we may want to follow through on them but sometimes we're not as good as our word.

Sometimes we promise and we're not able to fulfill that promise. sometimes we're able but we just don't want to. We're not faithful. But God is faithful.

[19 : 48] What he promised that he would do, he did. And Joshua, he's reminded them already and he reminds them again that God had promised that he'd take them into the land and he took them into the land.

God had promised that he would be with them and he was still with them. God had promised that he would never leave them and never forsake them and even though they were wayward and even though they were rebellious and even though they were so many things that were objectionable over time, he'd never forsaken them.

He disciplined them on occasions but he never washed his hands of them. God had promised that they didn't need to fear, they could be bold, they could be courageous, that takes us to the very beginning of the book, chapter 1, and they learned time and time again through experience that these words were not empty words, they were true.

And so Joshua here, he's actually in these last moments with these people, he's given them his testimony. he's not just giving them a dry lesson in theology, he is sharing with them his experience, their shared experience, that God is faithful.

That's the good news. It's the good news that Joshua shared, that he told. if we are Christians this evening, then we have that same good news that we are commissioned to tell, and we are commissioned to share.

[21 : 43] We are on this world to bring glory to God, and part of the way that we can bring glory to God is by telling the truth about the fact that he is faithful.

we can tell the good news about the attributes of God that we have sung of, he is gracious. You know, there are people out there this evening, even in Tarver, they don't know who God is, they don't know what he is like.

God has put us here so that we will tell people the good news about what God is like. He is gracious, he is good, he is loving, he is kind, he is trustworthy, he is faithful, he is dependable.

And we can open our Bibles, and we can tell people that from the story of Scripture, and we can open our lives, and tell people that as we share our experience.

We have good news to share about the attributes of God, we have good news to share about the purposes of God, what he has done. So many people out there think if I try hard and be nice and work hard and be religious, maybe I'll get to heaven in the end.

[23 : 01] It's not the Bible, it's not the truth. And God has called us to tell the truth, the good news about what he has done.

For God so loved the world that he sent his only son. And he lived for us, and he died for us, and he rose for us, and the truth is that whoever believes in him will not perish.

the good news of God's faithfulness, we've been called to share, as Joshua shared.

The good news about the promises of God, we could spend a series of sermons just going through God's many promises. promises.

These are promises that testify to God's faithfulness, that were told in the generations before Joshua, told by Joshua, heard by the people in front of Joshua, passed on through generation by generation by generation, and we sit here this evening, and we're still speaking about this, we're speaking about God's faithfulness, it's good news.

[24 : 18] And we need to tell it. We need to trust it.

We need to take hold of it, if we are to be saved. Jesus commissioned in Mark 16, Jesus said to them, to the disciples then, but it also is attributed to us as disciples today.

Jesus said, go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and baptized will be saved. What a wonderful good news message of salvation we've been given.

To take hold of, to trust, and also to share. God's prayer. But Jesus goes on in that sentence. He says, whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.

That's the good news. But whoever does not believe will be condemned. That's the bad news.

[25 : 37] And Joshua needed to make that plain also. He tells him the wilderness. Verse 15 is where the bad news really kicks in.

But just as every good promise of the Lord your God has come true, so the Lord will bring on you all the evil he has threatened until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you.

If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God which he commanded you, then 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.

And you know that's Joshua's last word. This is the last word that probably we would rather was not there.

Verse 14 seems such an appropriate place to say Amen. As Joshua expounds the glory of God's faithfulness.

[26 : 50] That would be such a positive note for Joshua to end his speech on. That would be such a great place for God's people to say Amen, Hallelujah, praise the Lord for his faithfulness.

But God the Holy Spirit inspired Joshua to carry on for one more point. And the point is this, not only is God faithful in keeping his promise to show grace, he's also faithful in keeping his promises to judge.

And that's where Joshua finishes. Let's give you two quotes from the commentators here. First, first of all, says, we need to remember that the faithfulness of God is a double-edged sword.

For just as he has faithfully brought about every good word he has spoken, so also will he bring about every disciplining word. God is consistent and what he has promised he will do, both for blessing, good news, and punishment, bad news.

Dale Raff Davis says, we may not prefer unhappy endings, but there is nothing wrong with an unhappy ending if it leads us to faithfulness.

[28 : 27] always the scriptures hold before us both the kindness and the severity of God. We forget either one to our peril.

so it's on that note that Joshua finishes. He said, I'm going the way of all the earth. My time here is done.

But I want you to remember this, says Joshua. I want you to know the truth, the truth of God's faithfulness and his love and his grace.

And I want you to know the truth, says Joshua, about God's seriousness to judge sin and to give punishment if we determine to rebel against him and go our own way.

And that's the message of the Bible. Not just the context of the speech of Joshua. those who repent will be saved, but those who do not will be lost.

[29 : 46] Those who believe are promised that they will gain eternity in heaven, but those who do not are warned of the fact that they will spend eternity in hell.

Those who trust in Christ will receive everlasting life and those who do not will experience everlasting death.

It's the message of the Bible. It's very stark, it's very black and white, but it's the truth. we need to take hold of it.

So what's the application to finish? It's choose life. The way of all the earth Joshua speaks of, the truth of the good news and the bad news that Joshua expounds and just finishing, the life.

life. Remember in the 80s, some of us, you can remember, we were in school in these years and there was a campaign in the 80s, I think it was, about not taking drugs.

[31 : 08] And the message, the strapline of the campaign was, choose life. Don't choose death and darkness and all that drugs will drag you into.

Choose life. And really that's what Joshua is saying. He's saying trust the God who is faithful. You know his faithfulness, you remember his faithfulness, you've seen his faithfulness, so trust him.

And choose life. Choose salvation. It's a conclusion that we're really implying at the end of his speech in chapter 23.

But it's a concluding application that comes with great force in this final sermon. In Joshua 24. He says there in verse 14, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living.

But as for me, says Joshua, and my household, we will serve the Lord. And who is the Lord?

[32 : 31] Jesus is Lord. And what did he say? He said, I have come that you may have life, life in abundance.

he is the life, he is the truth, and he is the way.

Each of us are going the way of all the earth. But what next? if you and I want to be assured this evening that we are on the way to heaven, then choose Jesus.

Call upon his name as saviour. Trust Christ as Lord. God and when God calls us to go the way of all the earth, we'll have nothing to fear and we'll have everything to gain.

Choose Christ. Let's pray. Our heavenly father, we thank you for your word and we thank you that whilst we are in time, you are the God who loves us enough to speak to us about the fact that our time here is so short and then there is eternity.

[34 : 17] we thank you that you have made it clear to us how we can gain eternity and not lose eternity. We thank you that you have told us the truth, the whole truth, about the blessing that there is for us if we trust Christ and the cursing, the damnation, the judgment that there is if we determine that we will resist Jesus.

It's very stark and it's hard for us to hear and it's hard for us at times to preach. But Lord, we know that in terms of this world, when things are serious and grave, we want the instructions to be very clear so that we will make the right choices.

And so in terms of eternity, where things are so much more important and so much more serious, we thank you that the message is crystal clear.

And if we want to be saved, we are to trust Christ. But Lord, we know that if we do not trust Christ, there is so much to fear.

So enable every one of us, we pray, whether we are old and well advanced in years or whether we are young and we feel like we have the whole of life ahead of us, we pray that even this evening, we would make our calling and our election sure by putting our faith in Jesus.

[35 : 50] And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.