

After a long time had passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man,**2** summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them: “I am very old. **3** You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you. **4** Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. **5** The Lord your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

6 “Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. **7** Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. **8** But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now.

9 “The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. **10** One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. **11** So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

Finish Well

Years ago my parents bought a piece of property closer to church. They had the intention of building a bigger home for a growing family and so my mom started a binder to keep track of all the paperwork, expenses and projects that needed to be done. She named it, “NEP” for Never Ending Project. I guess she got used to the fact that projects often piled up around the house. Often only the most pressing projects were the ones finished. My dad, probably a multitasker by compulsion rather than desire had a number of projects in process at any time. Parts and pieces were spread everywhere. If something weren’t finished within a short period of time then you wouldn’t be sure you could finish it in the future.

It looks like Joshua was much more organized than I was or am. It looks like he’s a task oriented guy who has finished his fair share of projects over the years. In fact everything is finished. The war was won and the people were at peace but that doesn’t mean there was nothing to do. Joshua encourages Israel, “Don’t give up now. You’re just getting started. Finish well with the help of the Lord.”

The same is true with Christianity. The war is over, the battle is won but that doesn’t mean there isn’t work to do. It’s easy to start something but more difficult to follow

through. It's easy to father children, but not so easy to raise them. It's easy to get married but not so easy to stay married. And yet it's impossible to become a Christian and only with the help of the Lord that we remain one. With the help of God and in Christ: Finish Well.

But for Joshua it doesn't look like there is much left to do. God has given, *"Israel rest from all their enemies around them."* In chapter 22 Joshua dismissed the eastern tribes, allowing them to return home after many years on the road. Another project was finished. Quite the accomplished general. Joshua has faithfully served the Lord not only when he was a young spy sent in to check out the promised Land, but also during the forty years of wandering in what appeared to be a stalled project, and even later in life after Moses passed on leadership to him. Joshua's taken a rag tag group of slaves from Egypt and then conquered a fortified nation. Joshua led God's people from victory to victory. If anyone could claim to have finished well it would be Joshua. But he's not done yet.

He's 110 years old and there isn't any regret or despair in his voice. Joshua is not discouraged or broken down when he calls the leaders to him. The author reminds us twice that Joshua was very old man. Everyone strains to hear from one who has Finished Well but instead of giving them advice on how to complete their projects, he gives glory to God. *You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you.*

Remember the Lord, the one who has done all of this for you. *The Lord your God fights for you. The Lord your God will push them out just as the Lord your God promised.* It should have been obvious to them all that it wasn't because of their military might or any special knowledge that they won all of these battles but it was because their God was with them. These battles were won but there is one area concern. It's not the physical battle that remains but the spiritual. Joshua is concerned for their future faithfulness. *"Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the book of the Law of Moses... Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them... serve them or bow down to them but hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now."*

It wasn't long ago that Christians could have looked around and said, "Well there is much left for us to do. We've conquered a nation." But just when it was thought that we can relax and enjoy the peace that God has given us. We find out there is more to be done. We too are outnumbered and ill equipped to claim America as our own. Then we realize

that it was only by God's power that we've come so far and it's only by God's power that I can speak confidently knowing that God will carry us on now into the future.

You may not be 110 but some of you are getting close, what advice would you give to those who follow after you? Like it or not all us are already saying what is most important. Through our words and actions, our obedience to God's Word or lack thereof we demonstrate that either we are at the center of our life or God is. We may fall into trap of an individualistic spirit that rejects all authority but its own. This religious individualism claims that only "self" can properly explain the Bible. Anything disagreeable can be disregarded making us our own pope free to manipulate or change God's Word and stall in obedience. That shows no love for God, for his Word, or for others.

Joshua warns us, *Be careful to obey all that is written. Don't associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve or bow down to them.* Avoid any union with Canaanites with those who teach falsely. Don't pretend everyone who claims to be Christian follows the same God. If not defined as the God who has done so much for us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit they are not the same. Don't call on their gods because doing so implies their reality and their power. Joshua moves from flirtation with others gods to outright adoration of them. But what if they're really really close? That's the question that's always asked right? What if they only reject God's Word in parts? That's the wrong question to ask. That's like asking, "How much can I cheat on my wife?" You don't.

Joshua was concerned for the spiritual welfare of his people. He was afraid that they would compromise the faith, give up on God's Word, and we don't have to go far to find out his fears were well founded. After his death, *"When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely.* The refrain resounds, *"did not drive out the Canaanites"* (Judges 1:28). Today Israel still does not possess the Promised Land. Because they didn't listen, obey, and God made good on his promise to remove them from the land and take away the Promise. *If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. 20 Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God"* (Deuteronomy 8:19). The promise was taken away from them and given to someone else. On their own they were failures. They fail again and again to finish. God finished well on his promise.

They needed God and God new just how hopeless they were. Although they failed to uphold their promise, although they did not finish let alone finish well - God would keep

his promise. The central theme of Joshua is that God keeps his promises. He kept his promise to Abraham, *"To your descendants I will give this land"* (Genesis 15:18). Joshua shows how God fulfilled that promise with a rag-tag group. Joshua moves forward with confidence that a God who fulfills his promises will continue to do so now and on into the future.

The Bible further demonstrates how God keeps his promises. God kept his promise to Adam and Eve when he sent his Son who finished well. He let everyone know it was finished on the cross. He finished what Israel failed to do in living as God's chosen people, serving as a light to the nations, faithfully obeying all of the commands of God. Jesus did all of this perfectly and then rose from the dead bringing peace. That is the God who finished well and kept every one of his promises.

We may face some of the same battles as Israel. We too may fail to finish projects, compromise on God's Law. The more we grow the more we realize how much we need God. We were hopeless, helpless without his sacrifice for us. But through Jesus forgiveness of sins is proclaimed. Through him everyone who believes is set free from sin.

Left to ourselves we would lose the battle every time. But God continues to fight for us. He has given us the Holy Spirit which wars against our sinful nature. He has given us his Son who serves as our perfect substitute. Make use of the gifts God has given: Word, Sacrament, Church - grow in the knowledge of our perfect savior from sin. Love the Law of God. Not only because it is good and beneficial for us but that is what God wants for us. Our God who has done so much for us. Follow him with all your hearts, soul, and strength. Joshua speaks forcefully when he says to "cling" to God. That's the same word Moses uses to describe long and lasting relationships between a husband and wife.

That's a project you will never finish. The Christian life is a never ending project quite possibly inspired by my dad's projects. It's project you will never finish until a pastor proclaims God's Word over a casket, "Well done good and faithful servant." You've finished well. It's only because Jesus finished for us and in our place that we can finish well. Amen.