

**The Promise Keeping God**  
**Joshua 21:43-45**  
**Sunday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023**  
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**Scripture:**

**Joshua 21:43-45**

*[43] Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. [44] And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. [45] Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.*

**Pray**

**Introduction:**

Imagine you're a little kid again. Your parents just made you a promise that you are going to get a new puppy for Christmas. However, in the months before Christmas you are kind of a terrible child. So then when Christmas comes and you are all excited about getting a puppy, you instead get goldfish. Imagine the devastation that would come over you at the moment.

This is sort of what it was like for the people of Israel throughout the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. You see God, very early on gives a promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-2. He says:

*[1] ...“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. [2] And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.*

So Abraham takes his wife and all his possessions and goes to the land that God showed him which was the land of Canaan. Then in Genesis 12:7 God says to him:

*[7] Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*

Once Abraham died, God reiterated this promise to his son Isaac in Genesis 26, and then again to Isaac's son Jacob in Genesis 28. But we know that this promise of a land went unfulfilled for a long time, and it looked like it would never happen until God reveals himself to Moses in Exodus 3:7-8 and says:

*[7] ...“I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, [8] and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.*

But even after that, we know how the story goes. God frees the people from slavery in Egypt, he makes a covenant with them at Sinai, and then right as they are supposed to go into the land, they choose to not trust God and he makes them wander in the desert for 40 years.

And if you were an Israelite during this time there would more than likely be this constant narrative going on in your brain. *“God made these promises to our forefathers and through Moses to us, but we haven’t trusted or followed his commands. Is he ever going to fulfill his promises to us or are we going to be stuck in this desert. Am I ever going to get this puppy.”*

**This is where the book of Joshua comes in.**

Now briefly, the book of Joshua is named the way it is because Joshua is the primary human figure and leader in the book. No author is identified, but many conservative scholars believe it was written at some point in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. As you scroll through or flip through the book you will also notice that it breaks up into three main parts:

**Part 1** deals with the conquest of the land in chapters 1-12

**Part 2** deals with land allotments for the tribes in 13-21

**Part 3** then is a conclusion and a farewell as Joshua calls the Israelites to the faithful worship of God in chapters 22-24.

And as you look over this whole book, and you read the opening verses in chapter 21, it becomes clear that the major theme of Joshua is promise keeping. **God is a promise keeping God who fulfills his promises to his people.**

This most clearly seen by the fact that God is giving them the land that he swore to Abraham in Genesis 12 and to his people in Exodus 3. **But that isn’t the only promise that we see fulfilled in this book.**

So this morning, with the idea and theme of promise keeping in mind, I want to briefly look at 4 promises that God fulfilled for his people in Joshua:

- 1. God’s promise to be with his people.**
- 2. God’s promise to fight for his people.**
- 3. God’s promise to rightly judge evil.**
- 4. God’s promise to give his people rest.**

And then at the end, I want to point us to something that is made very clear throughout Joshua and the books of the Pentateuch that we just walked through.

## 5. The blessings of God's promises require us to walk in his ways.

But let's begin by looking at the first promise that God fulfilled.

### 1. God's promise to be with his people.

#### Joshua 1:5

*[5] No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.*

So here is the scene, the people of Israel had been wandering through the desert for 40 years and the time had finally drawn near for them to go and take the land that God has promised so long ago to Abraham.

Up to this point the Israelites had experienced the goodness of God's presence as he led them through the desert by a pillar of cloud in the day and a pillar of fire by night.

But they have also experienced the harsh realities of God's presence being absent from them. After refusing to go into the promised land in Numbers 14, God pronounces judgement on the people.

The people of course freak out, realize their sin, and decide to go into the promise land as God had told them. But the problem is that God wasn't going to go with them. As Moses says in Numbers 14:41-42:

*[41] Why now are you transgressing the command of the LORD, when that will not succeed?*

*[42] Do not go up, for the LORD is not among you, lest you be struck down before your enemies.*

The result was that they were defeated in battle by the Amalekites and Canaanites.

So God's people knew all too well from their own history that they needed God's presence. And if he wasn't with them in this conquest then they would surely fail. **Yet God in his goodness and mercy right from the outset of this book reminds Joshua that he is with him.**

**...*Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.***

This is God's way of telling Joshua, and by extension the rest of Israel, "hey, I know it has been a long, winding, bumpy, and up and down road to get here, but we are here. And now that I have brought you here don't live in fear or worry, but instead trust me, because I am with you and for you."

And just to make sure that he got it, God confirms this reality to him again in Joshua 1:9 when he says:

***[9] Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.***

And from this point on, Joshua, along with the people of God, had the assurance of God's presence that allowed them to trust him and walk in faith as they conquered the land.

Now, I know that the past three years have been very hard for a lot of people. The pandemic has made some of us more fearful than ever about our health. It has made some of us more skeptical than ever about our health system in America, but more importantly our government.

We have also seen accelerated polarization in our society as we continue to experience so much turmoil surrounding the issue of race and sexuality in our culture. Not to mention the fact that in all of this it feels more and more like society has largely become secularized and the church and its influence marginalized.

**Let's face it, it can feel like we are living in a spiritual wilderness.** This of course isn't even taking into account the financial struggles many are feeling because of inflation. The uncertainty surrounding the possibility of recession, or just the day to day struggles we all feel in our own jobs, homes, and communities.

But as Christians, we have better promises given to us than what Joshua and the Israelites had. Where they had God's presence going before them in a pillar, the ark, and in the tabernacle. **Because of Christ we have the promise of God's presence both living within us and guiding us.**

As it says in 1 Corinthians 3:16:

***[16] Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?***

And Jesus says in the first part of John 16:13:

***[13] When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...***

In these past few years you may feel like you have been on a winding, bumpy road in the wilderness, but take heart because the God who promised his presence and guidance to Joshua and his people, **is the same God who dwells within us and promises that he will guide us in all that is true, right, and good.**

So if God has fulfilled his promise of his presence he also has and will fulfill his promise to fight for his people.

## 2. God's promise to fight for his people.

### Joshua 6:2

*[2] And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor."*

As we saw in point one. The opening of this book begins with God confirming with Joshua that his presence was going to be with him and with his people. This is also confirmed in chapter 3 and 4 as God causes the Jordan river to become a wall of water so the people can pass through it.

Then in the first part of chapter 5 God has this new generation reinstitute to covenant sign of circumcision as a reminder of their relationship with him.

But then they come to Jericho. Their first battle in the promise land, and their first battle without Moses. And the questions may have abounded. **We know that God is with us, and that he has brought us across the Jordan into this land, now will he fight for us? Will he really give us victory in battle? And will we actually be able to conquer and take this land that he promised to us?**

Yet, God in his goodness didn't leave them without answers. As they were by Jericho Joshua looked up and saw a man standing before him with a sword in his hands. And it says that Joshua asked this man **"Are you for us, or for our adversaries."**

But the man replied in Joshua 5:14:

*[14] And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?"*

God was once again reminding Joshua and the people of Israel that he was with them, and that he, as a mighty warrior, was going to fight for them. He then confirms this by saying he has given Jericho into their hands in 6:2, and then by making the walls of Jericho fall after the Israelites walked around it for seven days.

And from this point on this idea of God fighting for his people becomes a recurring theme throughout the book of Joshua. Look with me at the following verses:

### Joshua 8:1

*[1] And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. **See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land.**"*

### **Joshua 10:42:**

*[42] And Joshua captured all these kings and their land at one time, **because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel.***

Then toward the end of the book when Joshua is giving a final charge to the people, he says this in Joshua 23:3:

*[3] And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, **for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you.***

God does and will fight for his people.

Now, we need to be careful here. The way that God physically fought for his people and brought destruction to the nations in the land of Canaan should not be applied the same way to the church today.

For what did God say about our battle today?

Paul writes in Ephesians 6:10-12:

*[10] Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. [11] Put on the whole armor of God, **that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.** [12] **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.***

Our battle as Christians is not with people. It's not against the liberals, Joe Biden, abortion clinics, China, bad bosses, co-workers, or family members, you name it. These are not the things or people that we fight against as Christians.

**Instead, our main battle is against the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers over this present darkness. Which means that our main enemy is the devil.**

So the battle that God has called us to fight is not physical but spiritual. And because it's spiritual, God, in his goodness, has equipped us to be able to endure, withstand, and overcome the enemy until he returns. Look at the following verses:

### **Ephesians 6:13**

*[13] Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.*

### **James 4:7**

*[7] Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

And finally in Romans 8:37-39:

*[37] **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Our God, through Christ, has given us his armor and his weapons in order to fight the good fight of faith against our enemy the devil. **And the good news is that if we put our hope and trust in him, he will conquer the enemy on our behalf, and nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from his everlasting love.**

God has and will fulfill his promise to fight for us.

### 3. God's promise to rightly judge evil.

**Joshua 7:1, 25-26:**

*[1] But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.*

*[25] And Joshua said, "Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today." And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. [26] And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.*

So God had just defeated Jericho for the people of Israel and he told them that all the treasure in Jericho belonged to the Lord and was supposed to go into his treasury. However, a man named Achan decided that he was going to take some for himself.

As a result, the Israelites were defeated in the next battle they fought, and 36 Israelites died, because the Lord's anger burned against them because of his sin.

Joshua was very distraught and cried out to the Lord because he didn't understand what was going on, and God let him know that the people sinned against him by taking some of the treasure that was supposed to be given to God.

So God instructed Joshua to find and destroy the person that had done this along with all that he had, which included his family. **This led, Joshua and the people of Israel to burn Achan, his household, and all his stuff, so that God's anger would turn away from them.**

Now, I realize that this story makes us feel uneasy. It seems like such a harsh punishment not only to Achan, but especially to his household.

But when we see what feels like harsh examples of God's judgement in scripture, especially in the Old Testament, we need to remember a few things that help to put them in perspective.

One, that God is holy and perfect in all things. Remember God's words to Moses in Leviticus 19:2

*[2] "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, **You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.***

Two, because God is holy, he cannot be in the presence of sin which is why it says in Psalm 5:4:

**[4] For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you.**

Three, as a holy and set apart God, he must punish evil. As the Psalmist writes in Psalm 37:38

*[38] But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed; the future of the wicked shall be cut off.*

For God to be the one true and holy God he must rightly judge and punish evil. So even though it is hard, we need to see and believe that it is good and right for God to destroy Achan and his household.

**Also, if he didn't, it wouldn't be possible for God to be with his people because he cannot dwell with sin.**

And for us as New Covenant believers, we need to remember that God still rightly judges evil.

Luke 3:17

*[17] His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, **but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.***

Even though we don't always see God's judgement upon people in this life, our holy, perfect, and just God has unquenchable and eternal fire planned for the evil of this world. **As Christians this should be a cause for joy that all the wrongs of this world will one day be made right.**

But this should also cause us to worship God with humility and gratitude. Because we too deserve wrath and judgement from God. But instead of giving us what we deserve he poured his judgement upon his Son Jesus Christ. As Paul writes in Romans 5:8:

*[8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

So, even though we can't always understand God's ways we should have an attitude of thankfulness that God fulfills his promise to Judge evil. **But also, we should have an attitude of worship that God, in his mercy, hasn't punished us, but instead has given us a Savior.**



#### 4. God's promise to give his people rest.

##### **Exodus 33:14**

*[13] "Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." [14] And he said, **"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."***

In this part of Exodus God has just commanded the people to leave Mount Sinai right after they had sinned against him by worshipping the Golden Calf. As a result, he said he would give them the land, but that his presence would not go with them.

This was cause for great mourning and repentance that led Moses to come before God to plead for God's presence to go with him and the people of Israel. And God in his mercy heard Moses plea and says:

***"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."***

Despite their wickedness, despite all the ways that the Israelites had turned from God, he made a promise to Moses that he was going to be with them (his presence) and that he was going to give them rest in the land that he promised them.

And as we fast forward to the book of Joshua, we see the fulfillment of this promise in our opening verses this morning where it says in Joshua 21:44:

***[44] And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands.***

God through Joshua fulfilled his promise of a real physical rest for people Israel in the land of Canaan. The land flowing with milk and honey.

But we know that this was and is only a temporary rest. Because after the death of Joshua, the Israelites very quickly end up rejecting God and losing this rest as we will see next week in the book of Judges.

But we must remember that Joshua is what theologians call a type or a symbol. Though God used him to bring physical rest to his people Israel, he was a foreshadowing or picture of something and someone else greater to come. As the author of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 4:8-10:

***[8] For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. [9] So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, [10] for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.***

And today we know that the future day of rest that God was talking about is what he has provided, through the one and only true savior and rest giver, Jesus Christ. As Jesus says in those famous verses in Matthew 11:28-30:

*[28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

And if you are here this morning and you don't know Christ, or maybe you claim to be a Christian and yet you are trying to find fulfillment and rest in the physical things of this world. **I invite you to come to Jesus. Turn to him, confess your sins to him, and put your hope in the one and only one who can provide you with an everlasting rest, not only in this life, but in the one to come.**

So God has fulfilled his promises both to the Israelites and to us. His promise of presence, his promise to fight for us, his promise to rightly judge sin and evil, and his promise to give his people an everlasting rest.

And if God is the great promise keeper who fulfills all his promises, then scripture reminds us that his promises also require something of us:

#### **5. The blessings of God's promises require us to walk in his ways.**

**Joshua 23:4-6:**

*[4] Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. [5] The LORD your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you. [6] Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left...*

The resounding call of the book of Joshua and all the books of the law is that God is the one who fights for his people and fulfills his promises to them. But as we have seen in past week those promises both have blessings and curses.

And the blessings of God's promises, which are so good, pure, and true, come to us, as his people so long as we follow him and walk in his ways. As Paul writes in Romans 2:6-8:

*[6] He will render to each one according to his works: [7] to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; [8] but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*

Will we do this perfectly? no. Will we mess up time and time again? Yes. This is why we need a Savior. We could not and cannot be with God or follow on our own God because of sin. But in his mercy, he gave us his son Jesus Christ, who is a better and more perfect Joshua who will bring us into the heavenly promise land. And it is this savior this better Joshua who is working in us to walk in his ways. As it says in Philippians 2:13:

*[13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

So this morning, don't lose heart. But rejoice in the promise keeper who always fulfills his promises to us. Rejoice in our God who has given us a better more perfect Joshua in his Son Jesus Christ. And finally, in light of those promises, trust him, put your hope in him, and follow him all the days of your life and receive the eternal blessings and life that he has wondrously planned for you.

**Let's pray.**