
JOSHUA: GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND ISRAEL'S FEALTY

Introduction

Fealty, in the sense I am using it in the title of this sermon, is defined as faithfulness to a lord [in feudal times] or to someone in authority over you. For soldiers in the United States, their fealty was ultimately due to the President of the United States who is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

In the American civil war, there were many deserters on both sides of conflict. Desertion—the ultimate act demonstrating a lack of fealty to the powers over a soldier—was a capital offense and punishable by death.

There is in the State House at Albany a letter written by Abraham Lincoln granting pardon to a deserter. This is the way that letter reads:

"Executive Mansion, Washington, D. C., Oct. 4, 1864.

Upon condition that Roswell McIntyre of Co. E, Sixth Regiment of New York Cavalry, returns to his regiment and faithfully serves out his time, or until lawfully discharged, he is fully pardoned for any supposed desertion heretofore committed; this paper is his pass to his regiment.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN."

Written across the side are these words: *"Quartermaster's office, N. Y. City, Oct. 22, 1864. Transportation furnished to Baltimore, Md. H. BROWNSON."*

Down at the left this note is scribbled: *"Taken from the body of R. McIntyre at the battle of Five Forks, Va., 1865."*

And so, this deserter came back and died like a man, with his pardon on his person. Hindsight affirms that he was going to die one way or the other. In this case, he died a faithful soldier showing fealty to his country. As he lived his life, he knew not when he would die. Yet, he chose faithfulness over unfaithfulness.

The question for this soldier is the same question facing the Israelites in the last 3 chapters of Joshua. And significantly, the same question faces all of us who have sworn fealty to the God of the universe: "Will we be found faithful?"

This story recalls the quote from a commentary I shared last week in regards to faithfulness.

Commentator: "... faith [and I would argue faithfulness] finds both steadfastness and expectancy by rehearsing and revelling in Yahweh's past acts of faithfulness."

Pursue fealty (faithfulness) by rehearsing and reveling in what God has done and who God is.

Pursue fealty (faithfulness) by rehearsing and revelling in the work and the person of Christ.

Summary

Chapter 1-4 = Enter the Land

Chapter 5-12 = Take the Land

Chapter 13-21 = Possess the Land

Chapter 22-24 = Retaining the Land

Reminder

Joshua 21:43-45 ESV

[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.

In other words, GOD IS FAITHFUL!

But, to remain in the land fealty on Israel's part is necessary. Will Israel remain faithful is the underlining question. As we read the text, listen for this question and call for faithfulness.

Joshua 22-24

Joshua 22:5, 31 ESV

[5] Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

[31] And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh, “Today we know that the LORD is in our midst, because you have not committed this breach of faith against the LORD. Now you have delivered the people of Israel from the hand of the LORD.”

Joshua 23:1-8 ESV

[1] A long time afterward, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, [2] Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, “I am now old and well advanced in years. [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. [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, [7] that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, [8] but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day.

Joshua 24:14 ESV

[14] “Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

Three Meetings

East and West

- Joshua summons the eastern tribes—Reuben, Gad, ½ tribe of Manasseh—which had been fighting with the rest of Israel despite their land already being won
- Joshua commends them and sends them home with a warning to remain faithful
- The 2 and ½ tribes build an altar of imposing size
- The rest of Israel hears of the building of the altar and prepares to make war on their fellow Israelites – in Deuteronomy 12 it is clear that there was to be only one altar of sacrifice
- Israel sends a delegation of officials including the son of the high priest, Phineas, who ask the 2 and ½ tribes “What is this breach of faith you have committed...? (v16)
- The 2 and ½ tribes reply: “If it [building the altar] was in rebellion or breach of faith against the Lord, do not spare us ...” (v22)
- The altar was to be a witness to all of Israel that despite the geographical separation imposed by the Jordan River, the 2 and ½ tribes were united with the rest of Israel in the service and worship to the Lord
- Theme of this narrative: Joshua 22:31 (ESV) [31] And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh, “Today we know that the LORD is in our midst, because you have not committed this breach of faith against the LORD ...

Joshua and Leaders

- Joshua summons all the leaders of Israel—elders, heads, judges, officers— for a meeting
- Joshua’s instructions: **Joshua 23:3-8 (ESV)** [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. [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, [7] that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, [8] but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day.
- Theme of this narrative: **Joshua 23:6, 8 (ESV)** 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 ... [8] but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day.

Joshua and Israel

- Joshua gathers all of Israel
- Together they come before God
- Joshua reminds Israel of their history, a history abounding with episodes of God's faithfulness
 - The calling of Abraham
 - The giving of Isaac, and then Jacob and Esau
 - The Egyptian exodus story with Moses and Aaron – plagues, Red Sea
 - Victories over the enemies east of the Jordan
 - Crossing of the Jordan
 - The battle of Jericho
- Joshua, speaking for God, reminds Israel "... it was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant" (v12-13).
- Theme of this narrative: Joshua 24: 14a, 24 (ESV) [14] Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness ... [24] And the people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey."

The three meetings—East and West, Joshua and Leaders, Joshua and Israel—can be summed up with the charge "Remain faithful!" and the response "We will remain faithful!"

Two Catalysts

The three chapters also provide two catalysts for remaining faithful

A catalyst is defined as something which incites—that is, encourages, prompts, stimulates, empowers—activity

These three chapters give the catalysts for remaining faithful: 1) what God has done, and 2) who God is

What God Does

In these three chapters alone, God, Joshua, and the Israelites rehearse what God has done:

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- Given rest to Israel – v.4
- Fulfilled his promises – v.4
- Given them much wealth, much livestock, silver, gold, bronze, and iron, much clothing, spoil of their enemies – v.8
- Their own land – v.9
- Plagued the Israelites for the sin at Peor – v.17
- Judged Israel for Achan's sin – v.20
- Judged Achan and his family for his sin – v.20

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- Given Israel rest from all their enemies – v.1
- Given each tribe land – v.4
- Driven out the nations before Israel – v.9
- Supernaturally empowered Israel's warriors – v.10
- Kept every promise – v.14
- Never failed them – v.14

- I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, made his offspring many – v.3
- Gave him Isaac – v.3
- Gave Jacob and Esau – v.4
- Gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess – v.4
- Sent Moses and Aaron to Egypt – v.5
- Plagued Egypt – v.5
- Brought Israel out of Egypt – v.5
- Brought Israel across the Red Sea – v.6
- Defeated Egypt at the Red Sea – v.7
- Defeated the Amorites east of the Jordan – v.8
- Delivered Israel from Balak and Balaam – v.9-10
- Defeated Jericho – v.11
- Defeated the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites – v.11
- Gave Israel a land on which they had not labored and cities that they had not built – v.13
- Did great signs in Israel's sight – v.17
- Preserved Israel in all their journeys – v.17

The first catalyst for remaining faithful, the motivation for fidelity and power for fealty, is rehearsing the faithfulness of God as seen in the works He has done.

The second catalyst considers how the Israelites would revel in who God is.

Who God Is

Implicit – He is a God who...

- Expects obedience – 22:3
- Keeps his word – 22:4
- Is to be loved – 22:5
- Deserves complete worship – 22:5
- Blesses – 22:8
- Hates sin – 22:17
- Provides for his people – 23:4
- Is powerful – 23:9
- Protects his people – 23:11
- Has integrity – 23:14
- Omnipotent – 23:14
- Is gracious – 24:2-3
- Is Compassionate – 24:4-5
- Holds people accountable – 24:8
- Is merciful – 24:12-13

Explicit – He is a God who...

- Punishes sin – 22:17
- Is wrathful towards sin – 22:20
- Is mighty – 22:22
- Seeks revenge – 22:23
- Is sovereign – 22:25
- Is supreme in every way – 22:34
- Fights – 23:3
- Does not ignore sin – 23:13
- Always succeeds – 23:14
- Is jealous – 23:19

The second motivating and empowering catalyst for remaining faithful is who God is. Thus, the two catalysts for Israel to remain faithful seem to be the works of God and the person of God.

These three meetings which call for fealty and these two catalysts for faithfulness strongly express one message for us today

One Message for Us

Thus, generally speaking we might say:

Pursue fealty (faithfulness) by rehearsing and reveling in what God has done and who God is.

More specifically, as we remember our pre-commitment, from the very start of this sermon series, to see Jesus in the Old Testament book, we should say something like:

Pursue fealty (faithfulness) by rehearsing and revelling in the work and the person of Christ.

When we say “the work of Christ” we refer to the actions of Christ in his life and death to earn our salvation. His incarnation, his sinless life, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension.

When we say “the person of Christ” we refer to *who Christ is as our Saviour who is fully God and fully man in one person.*

From a sermon by Jonathan Edwards entitled *The Excellency of Christ.*

Pursue fealty (faithfulness) by rehearsing and revelling in the work and the person of Christ.

Six Practical Applications

1. Study the Word through bible reading.
2. Sit Under the Word through sermon listening.
3. Supplement the through other books.
4. Celebrate with the Saints through fellowship.
5. Celebrate in Song through praise.
6. Celebrate in Sharing through evangelism.