

Sermon on Joshua 23:1-11 – St. Paul’s Ev. Lutheran 7.23.17
“For the Love of God.”

Joshua 23:1-11 - 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. (NIV 2011)

“I turned on the evening news Saw a old man being interviewed Turning a hundred and two today Asked him what’s the secret to life He looked up from his old pipe Laughed and said “All I can say is” Don’t blink Just like that you’re six years old and you take a nap and you Wake up and you’re twenty-five and your high school sweetheart becomes your wife. Don’t blink You just might miss your babies growing like mine did Turning into moms and dads next thing you know your “better half” Of fifty years is there in bed And you’re praying God takes you instead Trust me friend a hundred years goes faster than you think So don’t blink I was glued to my TV when it looked like he looked at me and said “Best start putting first things first.” Cause when your hourglass runs out of sand You can’t flip it over and start again Take every breathe God gives you for what it’s worth.” Why is this 2007 Kenny Chesney Song still such a regular on the radio? It’s because there is some very real truth there. Each breathe is a gift from God. Pay attention to how you are living each day – and what to do with this breathe God gives you.

A few years before Kenny Chesney's song hit the airwaves, a man named Joshua neared the end of his life. He had faithfully led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land, taking over for Moses. Now Joshua was 110 years old. He said bluntly, *"I am very old. My days are up."* Joshua was born a slave in Egypt. Joshua had seen the parting of the Red Sea. Joshua had spied out the Promised Land and with Caleb gave the only encouraging report. All the others over 20 years of age had died in the wilderness. Even Moses did not get to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land, but only viewed it from Mt. Nebo. But Caleb and Joshua experienced and saw it all. Joshua led Israel's troops in wiping out godless nations to take over what was their inheritance from God. God had given peace to his people in the Promised Land. Harvests were good, milk and honey flowed, and the people were at peace. Joshua knew heaven was near. Joshua called out all the elders, leaders, judges and officials of the people.

Joshua addressed them, *"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 how God caused Jericho's walls to come-a-tumbling down, how God hurled hail stones down so big and fierce they killed the majority of the 5 king alliance of Amorites, how God had the sun stand still to help the armies of Israel win the victory, and other miraculous events. Don't forget.

Joshua said, *"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."* God gave each tribe and person land, land that was to stay in these families so that 1400 years later the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem in Judah, and be raised in Nazareth, preach in Capernaum, and die for the sins of the world outside the gates of Jerusalem, and be raised to walk those streets and to meet in Galilee, and to ascend from that land to heaven.

Joshua said, *"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 has promised you."* From 400 years of slavery to tent camping in the desert wilderness for forty years to battles unlike any they had experienced with a miraculous margin of victory to inheriting a land with fields ready for harvest, mature vines with grapes ripe for the picking, into homes furnished and ready for God's people. It must have seemed like a foretaste of heaven. God did all this. God accomplished this for his people, once slaves in Egypt. Now at peace – and any battles yet to fight – God would give them victory. All the land allotted to them was theirs. God promised. God delivered. God fought for his people.

What has God done for you? What battles has he won for you? A great many. It should not be hard to remember all the good things God has done for you in your life and given to you in your life. Sure the devil works hard to make us forget and flash lies before our eyes that make us discontent. Our sinful natures try to sour even the sweetest of foods, experiences and gifts. The world constantly beckons, "It's not enough – God doesn't love you. If he did you would have this and that, or he would take away this thorn in the flesh." But what has God done for you, which battles has he won for you? In your worship folder on the sermon card, on the front side, there is room for five things. Take a moment and fill it out mentally or with pen and pencil.

Joshua had witnessed the greatest victories God's people had seen grand scale. But these paled in comparison to the greatest victory ever to be won years later, when the promised Messiah was born in Bethlehem – as he lived as our substitute – sinless in a sinful world – as he took our sins upon himself and was rejected by his fellow man and placed on a cross. The earth physically darkened as he battled the pangs of hell and suffered in our place. He died. But this was not the end. Our punishment was done. After three days, the devil's power was destroyed once and for all, death's teeth were knocked out with one blow, as Jesus walked out of that tomb – alive and glorified. God declares us forgiven. Jesus promised. Jesus delivered. Jesus fights for us. That's number 1.

I imagine that on your lists are stories that could bring you to tears if you were to speak them – stories of life after death, sunshine after rain, healing after the horrible, and certainty after doubt and despair. Blessings abound as you think about family, friends, opportunities, and God's sustaining hand. Remember what God has done for you, and then you realize, he still fights your battles for you. He engages us and uses us as a good parent does their children, but it is Him. It always has been. His strength and his power uphold us and guide us.

Listen to Joshua, *"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. 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. But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now."* Just one step off the path, just walk up on the curb for a bit – that's the devil's temptation. Whether that sin is something you accomplish with your eyes, think in your brain, say with your mouth, or do with your body, whether feet going where you ought not go, mouth taking in what is not good for your body or soul, or spewing out what does not build up or give glory to God, or hands taking or doing what they

ought not, or worse. Just once, just one more time, it's ok for you – NO! *“Not to the right or to the left.”* Joshua even says, “Don't even associate with bad company – it will corrupt you in one way or another.” Bad company corrupts good character. Pretty soon you are talking like them, acting like them and doing what they do – and you leave God in the dust maybe not right away, but the devil's plan is eventually. 8th grade I wanted with all my heart to be cool in the eyes of some of the guys in my class. So one summer day a buddy and I went to hang out with one of these guys. This guy wanted to stop by a friend's house quick on our way to the park. So unwittingly we were part of a drug deal – standing there wide eyed as money was exchanged for drugs. Then we all played look out as we went into the woods at this park. And this cool guys does the drugs and offers it to us – just to try, for free. “Just take a step off the path.” You all have had or will have these situations – maybe not as blatant, maybe not with drugs, and maybe only you are there. But Joshua says, “For the literal Love of God, don't!” *“Hold fast to the LORD your God.”* Cling to God and his love and his Word. Like a husband and wife are to cling to one another in marriage, so we cling to our God for strength and help.

But I am weak, sinful, and don't always make the right choices. Look to him who is strong, holy, and almighty. Look to the LORD and his promises for strength. Joshua says this, *“The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. One of your routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. So be very careful to love the LORD your God.”* Look where you are – in God's house, with all your history behind you. The LORD has brought you this far – sometimes limping, sometimes discouraged, sometimes triumphant, but don't look in – look back and see the victory and the victories he's won, especially in Christ. He says to you about these battles, *“One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised.”* Has God ever lied to you? No. And he never will go back on his promises. Realize his love for you and his fight for you. Take up his armor and fight for him. Love him back with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. He'll provide the power. He's already won the victory. You ain't 102 or 110 yet, “best start putting first things first” **For the Love of God: His love for you and your love for Him. Amen.**