



This morning we continue our series in Joshua. This is our second week in a new section of the book. In Chapters 1-12 we saw Israel, led by Joshua, conquering the Promised Land. Then in chapters 13-21 the action slows considerably. In these chapters Joshua divides the Promised Land among the 12 tribes of Israel. Joshua's leadership role changes from leading the Israelites into battle to leading them into settling in their allotted land.

This morning, if we were to focus in and look at the minute detail of chapters 15-19, we see lots of locations and names that are hard to pronounce and we kind of get bogged down. But if we step back and give it a broad look we see a beautiful thing: The promise God made to his children was being fulfilled right before their eyes. God's promise of land that was made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier, and passed down to his son Isaac and then to his son Jacob and then picked up by Moses, was being literally being kept under the leadership of Joshua. So this morning, in Joshua chapters 15-19 we hope to answer three questions:

1. How do we embrace God's promises?
2. How do we error and disrupt God's promises?
3. How do we understand and apply God's promises for today?

How Can We Embrace God's Promises?

By standing on the promises of God

The allotment for the tribe of Judah, according to its clans, extended down to the territory of Edom, to the Desert of Zin in the extreme south (15:1).

Some of us remember the old hymn, *Standing on the Promises of God*. Starting here with the tribe of Judah in verse 1 all the tribes and clans in Israel were literally standing on the promises of God. Commentaries will tell us that in terms of current national borders this promised land covers modern Israel, modern Jordan, a large part of Saudi Arabia, half of Iraq, all of Lebanon, part of Syria and all of Kuwait.

What does it look like to stand on the promise of God? One of my favorite movies is *Moneyball*. The story takes place back in 2001 when the Oakland Athletics general manager Billy Beane was upset by his team's loss to the New York Yankees in the 2001 postseason. With many of his star players leaving to go to bigger money cities, Billy, with a limited payroll, attempts to assemble a team that could compete. Beane meets Peter Brand, a young Yale economics graduate with radical ideas about how to assess players' value. Sensing opportunity, Beane hires Brand as the Athletics assistant general manager.

During the 2002 season, the Athletics win an unprecedented 20 consecutive games, setting the American League record. Despite all their success, the A's lose in the first round of the postseason.

As Beane sits alone in the clubhouse, Brand attempts to convince him that he "won pretty big." Seeing that he is unconvinced, Brand invites Beane to the video room. Brand has cued up a segment of tape for Beane to watch—a clip about a player named Jeremy Brown, a catcher from their minor league baseball team, the Visalia Oaks. Brand narrates as the clip plays: "The Visalia Oaks and our 240-pound catcher Jeremy Brown, who as you know, is scared to run to second base, this was in a game six weeks ago. This guy [the pitcher] is going to start him off with a fast ball. Jeremy's gonna take it to deep center. Here's what's really interesting, because Jeremy is gonna do what he never does—he's gonna go for it; he's gonna round first and he's gonna go for it."

In the video, Jeremy rounds first and appears to be headed for second, only to stop and crawl back to the security of first base. He clings to first base like a frightened child clings to a teddy bear. "This is all Jeremy's nightmares coming to life," says Brand. "Ah, they're laughing at him," says Beane. Brand says, "Jeremy's about to find out why they were laughing at him; Jeremy's about to realize that the ball went 60-feet over the fence. He hit a home run, and he didn't even realize it." Beane stares at the screen as Jeremy finally discovers that the ball went out of the park and then jubilantly rounds the bases for home. Beane smiles and asks, "How can you not be romantic about baseball?" "It was a metaphor," Brand responds. "I know it was a metaphor," replies Beane.

For us to understand how to stand on the promises of God, we need to remember that like that 240-pound catcher, Jeremy Brown's behavior is also a metaphor for the Christian life. Christ has already hit the home run that brings us home. His righteousness has been credited to our account and we are now at peace with God. We don't have to live in fear, carefully crawling back to and then clinging to first base. Instead, we can jubilantly run the race as we head confidently toward home.

As God had promised, he hit the home run for the Israelites. The land was theirs. They were literally standing on the promise. God's promise had cleared the fence. Now to embrace the promise, they simply had to run around the bases. They had to act on the promise of God.

By acting on the promises of God

After laying out the boundaries, Joshua takes us back to Caleb who was a man who acted on the promises. Do you remember when Moses sent the spies into the land, up into the hill country, and they saw a beautiful and fertile land that flowed with milk and honey? In Numbers 13 we read that the spies entered this beautiful land and they also saw fortified cities in this hill

country called Hebron. And they saw a bunch of big strong warriors named the sons of Anak. When they saw their enemy, every spy except for Joshua and Caleb cowered in fear, clinging to first base even though God had hit the home run. Now, 40 years later God had delivered on his promise—the Lord remembered Caleb and gave him that land of Hebron as a fulfillment of his promise.

In accordance with the Lord's command to him, Joshua gave to Caleb son of Jephunneh a portion in Judah—Kiriath Arba, that is, Hebron. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.) From Hebron Caleb drove out the three Anakites—Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi, the sons of Anak. From there he marched against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher) (verses 13-15).

Then Caleb does something that may seem strange to us.

And Caleb said, "I will give my daughter Aksah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher." Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's brother, took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Aksah to him in marriage (v. 17).

Caleb gave his daughter to the guy, who happened to be his nephew, who defeated the final enemy dwelling in his promised land. Why? No doubt Caleb could have defeated all his enemies himself, but think about it. Attacking an enemy would require Othniel to have a faith like Caleb's. Caleb wanted to make sure his daughter was married to a man who had faith and who was standing on the promises of God.

For those of us who consider ourselves on the older side in age, we need to understand the impact we have on the next generation when we act on the promises of God. Caleb became a source of blessing, encouragement, spiritual influence and strength in his family. If you read ahead into the book of Judges you will see that Othniel became the first judge God raises up to lead the nation of Israel during that dark time. Caleb was reaching the next generation because he acted on the promises of God. How else do we embrace the promises of God?

By giving thanks for the promises of God

This is the inheritance of the tribe of Judah, according to its clans: (v. 20).

Something like 87 names follow verse 20. The idea with the detail reminds us that the blessings of God were not some purely spiritual, inner abstraction. The blessings of God that Joshua details are concrete, tangible and visible. They could see it, smell it, run their fingers through it. God is saying my blessing is not just an idea, not just thoughts, but in a word, real estate. And as we reflect on them—even this thanksgiving—remember those blessings. Don't take for granted the bite out of a juicy apple, a walk in the park, a toilet that flushes, the breakfast you had this morning, your garbage that was picked up on time, the friendships you have.

I was reminded last spring when my best friend Stan and his wife Judy came here to be a part of my daughter's wedding. It meant so much to me. You see, Stan and I have been friends since kindergarten over 50 years ago. We grew up as neighbors, team mates, double dating, we graduated college together, we served in ministry together, we have enjoyed the Los Angeles Lakers together and theology together, and we were best men at each

other's weddings. And so many more stories, tangible life experiences and blessings. We have watched our kids grow up together. In fact, Stan's entire family is with us today! His beautiful daughter Laurin and two young men who love Jesus and serve him. Brett and Eric are young men who stand on and act on the promises of God like Othniel. I have been remiss to specifically thank God for my friendship with Stan. It's as real, tangible and valuable as the real estate promised to the Israelites.

How Do We Disrupt God's Promises?

By being passive with God's promises

I want to illustrate this point with a contrast. In chapter 17 we read about five young sisters who were not at all passive and God rewarded them with an inheritance.

Now Zelophehad son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, had no sons but only daughters, whose names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirzah. They went to Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the leaders and said, "The Lord commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our relatives." So Joshua gave them an inheritance along with the brothers of their father, according to the Lord's command (17:3-4).

Back in Numbers 27 we read that Zelophehad died in the wilderness and he left five daughters and no sons. So what was customary was for the inheritance to go to the nearest male relative, but these proactive sisters went directly to the head guy—Moses—and made a case for receiving their inheritance. Moses agreed. Now they went to Joshua and the leaders to make their case. And like Moses, Joshua and the leaders gave them their father's inheritance.

I hope you see it as encouragement that God wants to give all of us, men and women alike, all of our spiritual inheritance, all of His blessings in the fullness and richness that he determines. We don't experience it, more often than not, because we do not ask for it. This is wonderful boldness by these sisters. They are not afraid to ask for what is rightfully promised them. Do you see yourself as bold or passive in your prayers? Wouldn't we all stand more firmly on the promises of God if we prayed more deeply, confidently and boldly?

Another way we can disrupt God's promises is by being discontent with God's promises. Joshua contrasts the faith of these five daughters with the faithlessness of these sons of Joseph.

By being discontent with God's promises

The people of Joseph said to Joshua, "Why have you given us only one allotment and one portion for an inheritance? We are a numerous people, and the Lord has blessed us abundantly." "If you are so numerous," Joshua answered, "and if the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves there in the land of the Perizzites and Rephaites" (17:14-15).

Two tribes of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim were complaining that God had not given them enough room. So Joshua told them if they wanted more room to go up into the forested hill country and clear it for planting. Well, the tribes of Joseph were apparently not interested in hard work. And they were likely afraid of

Rephaites who were also mentioned as giants. They don't want to work and they don't want to fight. They have come to embrace the status quo. They lived with relative security and comfort.

The people of Joseph replied, "The hill country is not enough for us, and all the Canaanites who live in the plain have chariots fitted with iron, both those in Beth Shan and its settlements and those in the Valley of Jezreel" (v. 16).

Basically they are saying, "We don't want to do it. It's too hard, we can't. We don't even think we should have to do it."

But Joshua said to the tribes of Joseph—to Ephraim and Manasseh—"You are numerous and very powerful. You will have not only one allotment but the forested hill country as well. Clear it, and its farthest limits will be yours; though the Canaanites have chariots fitted with iron and though they are strong, you can drive them out" (17:17-18).

Joshua is reminding them that God's promises are at least as real as Canaanites' chariots that are fitted with iron. But they will see little of his power until they venture out into the way of obedience, until they trust in the promises enough to walk in them.

The spiritual issue for us is to not complain about our circumstances but ask, "Lord, how can I maximize the place where you have put me?" This week I thought about the times I've complained to the Lord because I wanted something more or something different than God saw fit to give me in his timing. More times than I can remember, I've whined. I was a whiner. But here were the words to me. "Faithfully use the resources God gave you, bloom where you are planted, do something constructive and you will be more useful to those around you because you will be embracing God's promises."

You might be thinking all this land stuff is fine, but really? I don't see God regularly giving land to his people today. It's hard for me to relate to land right now in my life as a blessing. I live in a condo and the only dirt I have is the dirt in a pot on my deck with a dwarf lemon tree in it. The only one who uses that dirt is our cat. The best way to understand and apply these land images is to view the land as the church and our lives in Christ. The land in the OT is only the prelude to the promise of our life in Christ. So with that framework think about this:

God's Promises Offer Us God's Unique Presence

The whole assembly of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there (18:1a).

At the beginning of Joshua 18 it says that the entire nation—over two million people—gathered at a place called Shiloh to worship. This would be a new place where sacrifices were offered, where God met them in the tent, where they could worship God without fear, where they could worship him in this new land faithfully, joyfully and securely.

Joshua and all of Israel were constantly reminded of God's presence. They needed to know that God would never let them down and never let them go. One of the greatest promises of the NT is that God's presence is with us now and in the future. In John 14:18, Jesus said, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have his life in you

right now just as powerfully as the Israelites had in Joshua's day. No matter what you are going through, God is with you.

Paul writes in Philippians, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). Paul writes again in Ephesians; in fact he prays for us, "For God would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:14,16). Peter says, "You have become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Through life in Christ, God delivers on his promise to have a unique presence with us.

God's Promises Offer Us Rest and Security

Here is a reminder of rest and security in the land from back in the book of Deuteronomy. "But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety" (12:10). Remember that the Israelites lived in very unsure times. They were desert wanderers who had to constantly worry about their enemies and had very little security.

The NT picks up this idea of rest and security. Instead of trusting in land and in borders, we gain security by trusting in Jesus who said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 1:29-30). A heavy yoke was put on work animals to keep them controlled and useful to the farmer. Spiritually speaking Jesus compares wearing heavy yokes to wearing burdensome religious traditions, rules and regulations. But Jesus is saying when we wear his yoke it leads to rest and gives us security.

Our community group was talking about the Sabbath and we were so convicted that if we ever even tried to find rest, we were inclined to seek it in rewarding our hard work with worldly recreation, worldly solutions for security, and we wondered why we were still weary. We are inclined to put on every yoke but the yoke of Christ. But he says stay near to him to find real rest.

God's Promises are an Inheritance for All

If we didn't think the concept of inheritance was important to God before this morning, you likely see it now. In careful detail God's promise of an inheritance for all is laid out.

You are to divide the land into seven parts. Judah is to remain in its territory on the south and the tribes of Joseph in their territory on the north. After you have written descriptions of the seven parts of the land, bring them here to me and I will cast lots for you in the presence of the Lord our God. The Levites, however, do not get a portion among you, because the priestly service of the Lord is their inheritance. And Gad, Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh have already received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. Moses the servant of the Lord gave it to them" (18:5-7).

If you are a follower of Christ, he too has given you an inheritance. It's much more valuable than land. Jesus has given you his precious promise of eternal life, and he's left each of us with the precious promise of the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. If

you are a follower of Jesus, your inheritance is Jesus himself and life with him. Jesus is our reward...to enjoy now and for eternity.

God's Promise to Us is Received by Faith Alone

As we follow this teaching series through Joshua, we have learned that it took great faith to occupy the promised land. Remember sticking their toes in the water before they crossed the Jordan on dry land, remember Jericho. God parted the river, God defeated Jericho, not Joshua. The same is true about the Christian life; it is entered on faith alone. In John 3:16 Jesus says that *"whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* The word "believe" is the word faith or trust. Salvation is a gift that is received by believing in it. Both receiving the land and receiving Christ happen by faith alone. Paul makes this point very clear when he said, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God..."* (Eph. 2:8).

God's Promises are Gifts from God

As we have seen the land given to Israel was a gracious gift from God. As we fast forward to the NT, we read of another gift from God. *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 6:23). The importance of land in the OT shifts to the importance of eternal life in the NT—our salvation is a gift from God. We don't earn it and we certainly don't deserve it. The promise we stand on is not land, it is the person of Jesus Christ.

Author Paul Trip writes, "If you're one of God's children, you have been given the most awesome gift that could ever be given. It's gorgeous from every perspective. It's a gift of such grandeur that it's hard to wrap human vocabulary around it and explain it. It's beautiful from every vista. It's the gift that every human being needs. It's a gift that in all of your work and all of your effort and all your achievement you couldn't have ever earned; you could have never deserved; you could have never achieved. It's absolutely without question the gift of gifts. It's the gift of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I am deeply persuaded in the face of this gift, there are many Christians who are content to play with the box." Don't play with the box; enjoy the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

God's Promises are to be Acted Upon

So Joshua said to the Israelites: "How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you? (18:3).

We remember all the hang-ups, the unbelief, the fear that the Israelites had as God brought them through their journey to stand on their promised land. We have learned that God had much for them to learn, much to work through to grow in their faith. As we see the NT, there is ongoing action, ongoing challenge, ongoing growth opportunities, ongoing obedience needed as we continue to work out our own spiritual journeys. In fact, Paul says we work out our salvation with an attitude of

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

seriousness that we are in the presence of an awesome God. Look at how Paul describes the spiritual journey of growth in Christ. *"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling..."* (Phil. 2:12).

Do you feel like you have impossible races to run? That you are fighting terrifying battles? That you are in a deep hole that you struggle to climb out of? Know with absolute certainty that you are flooded with the presence of God who will run, fight, climb with you, for you and through you. It's a promise you can stand on today. And as we think about God working at our South Campus, God has much to teach us as we work out our faith with fear and trembling. God has given us an opportunity to grow here through the exciting, the mundane, the exhausting, the rewarding, the life-changing as he conforms us to his image and charges us to reach a community that desperately needs Christ. Working out our salvation requires each of us to expand our vision, look at the church and our community through new lenses, to learn new skills, to engage in the work of ministry, to be obedient, and to be brave just like the Israelites.

God's Promises Have an Already-But-Not-Yet Quality

And finally, after every other tribe and clan were able to stand on their promise, Joshua the old man gets his promise.

When they had finished dividing the land into its allotted portions, the Israelites gave Joshua son of Nun an inheritance among them, as the Lord had commanded. They gave him the town he asked for—Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim. And he built up the town and settled there (19:49-50).

Did you know that even as they claimed all the land they never really took all of it? And we see that ultimately it was unfulfilling. It was just dirt. Israel longed for something more. The New Testament tells us about this. The writer of Hebrews tells us about these OT saints: *"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect"* (Heb. 11:39-40).

Jesus is the greater Joshua. Jesus is God with us. What do I mean by "already but not yet"? As followers of Christ, we have Christ now, but we will live with a tension because our world is broken. We live in a tension because of our sin nature. We crave more of God. We long to see justice, we long to see the end of death, disease, pain and suffering. We live with this tension of having Christ already, but not yet in his fullness. We look forward to one day when there will be no more tension. It will be realized when Jesus comes again and redeems and heals all of creation fully and for all eternity. Our big idea this morning is: We can stand securely on the promises of God no matter what because we stand on the rock solid foundation of Christ.

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