

January 12, 2020

Great Themes of the Bible: Joshua-Kings “Trust and Fidelity”

Joshua 24:14-19

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Last Sunday, our first installment of “Great Themes of Scripture” worship series looked at the book of Exodus where we saw the themes of rescue, liberation and freedom, and how being in relationship with God calls us to live our life according to God’s plan and will.

Today’s installment will cover Joshua – Kings.

The first theme introduced in these books is monotheism. Now before you think you know that word, let’s pause for a moment to move beyond our preconceived ideas to explore the meaning of the word – monotheism. **Authentic monotheism** is not an abstract belief that there is one God rather than many gods “up there”. It is a concrete confidence in one God “down here” who offers real salvation, as opposed to the many false gods who offer nothing more than empty promises. It was hard for Israel to have concrete confidence in one God. They could not believe that God would really save them, and so they were always trying to make alliances with other gods and nations instead of trusting in God.

Now, before we get too proud and puffed up because we are monotheists, of course! We need to acknowledge that we are only authentic monotheists when we put our faith in the one God who is, instead of selling out to lesser gods who cannot save.

The second theme we see in the book of Joshua is that **God is seeking to move the people forward.** Take for example after the people of Israel go through the parted waters of the Jordan River into the land of Canaan, they destroy the cities they come across. They kill any survivors and burn their cities, and offer it up as a sacrifice to God.

Revolting no? Yes, yet it was an improvement. Before behaving in this way, the standard was to torture the conquered, rape their women, enslave their children and loot their possessions. Whether we like it or not, this story is just one among many where God meets people where they are and calls them forward, one step at a time. God did not ask Israel to abide by the just war theory or the principles of nonviolence. Instead, the Israelites were told to go into a town and put it “under a ban,” that is, to consecrate it and set it aside for the Lord. God asked Israel to refrain from raping and looting and enslaving, in all they were to offer it up to God. In this way they could learn that they did not have to depend on things in order to be happy. What we see in the book of Joshua is an early stage of a slow, sometimes painful evolutionary growth in the understanding of where God is leading God’s people. In light of this, we must ask, “Where do we need growth in our morality as individuals and where do we need to see evolution in our morality as a community and a nation. Are we moving forward, for that is God’s will.

In the book of Joshua, chapter six to be specific, we see God trying to show the people there is **a different way to fight a battle.** They must of thought God was initially kidding when God told them to march around the city walls in silence, then on the last day go around blow your horns and trumpets, and the city walls of Jericho will fall. The Lord is teaching them a whole new way to win over evil.

Have we forgotten this tactic of God, of not fighting violence with violence? God does not ask us to let evil stand. Rather, God asks us to address evil God's way. There is another such example in 2nd Chronicles Chapter 20, where the Israelites were confronted by a might army, and instead of instructing them to put the archers and spear carriers in front, God tells them to put singers singing God's praises on the front line. The enemy is thrown into confusion and the Israelites win without even trying (except for a choir practice or two). True spirituality is supremely creative.

Does all this sound a bit unreal and naïve? What do we want to do when we are faced with our own Jericho in our life? We see the huge walls, and we want to take them by storm. We see those stubborn obstacles and our common sense tells us to use everything within our power against them. But, God says there is a new kind of power that we should use instead. It is the **power of nonviolence, the power of the love, and the power of truth.**

In the closing chapter of the book of Joshua, Joshua calls the people together and gives them a final address, which Marian read this morning. In summary, he reminds them of their vocation to **choose-and to keep choosing-the Lord.** Don't turn to the left and don't turn to the right, walk the straight and narrow path the Lord has set them upon. Above all, they are to worship God alone, not believing or trusting in any other gods. And if they live according to their vocation of choosing God and God alone, God's power will be theirs.

Now the hard work begins for them and for us: remember God or forget God? They must decide, and we must too! Are they going to serve the Lord or turn to other gods? Are we going to

serve the Lord or turn to other gods? They must decide and we must too! Are they going to trust in God's power or in their own effort? Are we going to trust in God's power or in our own effort? They can't have it both ways, and Joshua tells them so. We can't have it both ways, and Joshua tells us so, too! And they did choose God, and so have we.

Sometimes we are distracted, other times we are lured by that which in end nearly drown us!

(Video of Woman Falling Into a Fountain in Beijing While Texting)

And all was well – not! The next book of the Bible Judges fills us in. In this book, we see a single pattern repeated time and time again.

Take for instance the story of Gideon where God promises him the strength he will need to fight the Midianites. Gideon send messengers to the tribes of Israel that God is about to deliver them, so Israel puts together a great army. God tells Gideon he has too many men. So, Gideon cuts his army in third, yet there are still 10,000 left. God decides 10,000 is too many. So God put the rest through a test, Joshua tells them to go down to the river and get a drink. Some do so with weapons in hand, others lay down their weapons and cup their hands and drink. God says to Joshua, send everyone home who did not lay down their weapons, everyone who did keep because they trusted me enough.

We're always fighting our own battles, and as long as that continue, we say to God that we don't need God. By doing this we then place other gods before God.

I would be amiss, if I did not tell you the other major example from Israel of mistrust and infidelity, and it is this: the people ask the prophet Samuel (found in 1st and 2nd Samuel) to establish a monarchy. From the very outset it is clear that this new institution is a concession to the weakness of the people. They need to have a visible ruler. Samuel goes on to tell them, it is okay to have a king, but both the king and the people need to listen to the Lord God. For only God alone save and bring salvation. And so we have King Saul, David and Solomon each with their weaknesses, each unable to save or bring salvation, each at times did not listen or surrender to the Lord, but rather made themselves Lord.

During this time (David's time), the people begin to see the reversal of the pattern they saw earlier. During the time of the Judges, Israel would forget God's love for them, be oppressed, repent and be delivered. Now Israel starts seeing God deliver them before they repent. They are beginning to see the **unconditional love of God**. They are coming to see that there is nothing they can do to merit salvation and deliverance. God delivers and redeems because that is who God is. God is the liberator, God is the one who frees. God is the lover, always the initiator.

And thus we have the theme of **grace**. The fact is this, the awareness of God's unfailing love leads to true repentance. Authentic repentance (the change of heart and change of direction) comes from the experiences that God has first loved us, and in that we find the power to love in return. Meister Eckhart put it this way centuries ago, "the eyes by which we look back at God are the very same eyes by which God first looked at us.

Yet, some of us never see ourselves with the same love God sees us. Throughout my entire ministry, I have encountered many people who can't accept God's unconditional love for them, who never, ever feel "worthy", always feeling worthless. Why? My guess is this – someone in "authority" church told them and they believed it. Let us not trust the "kings" of this world, but God only; for there is only one God, who loves us, every, very much.

Next Sunday, we will delve in the books of the prophets in scripture and see what those radical traditionalists have to say, especially what they have to say to us. Stay tuned.