

How To Stand Fast In The Lord

Joshua 23

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I want you to follow me as I read verses one and two, and it sets the background for Joshua's farewell speech. Verse one, "It came to pass, and a long time after, that the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all of their enemies round about."

So for seven years, they've conquered the land. Some more time has lapsed, and their time is resting, and enjoying their inheritance. Joshua waxed old, verse one, "and was stricken in age. And Joshua called all of Israel and for their leader, their elders and for their heads and for their judges and for their officers. He said to them, I am old and stricken in age." General Douglas MacArthur appeared before Congress on April 19th, 1951 after being relieved of his duties [by] Truman. His address ended with these moving words, quote, "The world has turned over many times since I took oath on the plain of West Point. And the hopes and dreams have long since vanished, but I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barracks' ballads of that day, which proclaimed most proudly that old soldiers never die, they just fade away. And like the old soldier in that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away. An old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the sight to see that duty." Joshua is now an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him to sight to see that duty. And in the second verse, he uses the phrase, "I am old and stricken in years." And then again in verse two there at the end, he says, "I am old and stricken in years. I am waxed old and I am stricken in years." I like that phrase to describe old age, "I'm stricken in years." Old soldiers do die though, and Joshua knew that he was going to go the way of all flesh. In verse 14, we'll get there in a moment. And he said, "I am going the way of all the earth." He was going to die. So Joshua wants to make an appeal to the people of Israel, "Remember all that God has done for you. Don't turn away from the Lord and follow the gods of the heathen around you. And if you do, the consequences will be dire. So you can make a choice today, either the good blessings of the Lord or the evil that will come upon you, depending upon who you follow." When we get to chapter 24 next week, Joshua makes that famous statement, "Choose you this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will...", what? "Serve the Lord," amen?

Joshua is now beginning his speech. Now, his speech at this point is directed more toward the leaders, the elders, their heads, and the judges, and their officers, verse one. So primarily speaking to the leaders, but it also has application to the entire nation of Israel. So in this 23rd chapter, Joshua has the first installment of his farewell speech to the nation. Now what was the main concern on Joshua's heart? What was it that was uppermost in Joshua's mind? And the answer to that was he didn't want them to fall away. The technical word would be apostatize. You didn't want them to turn away from God. So the whole speech has that overarching kind of theme, do not forget God, do not turn away from God, do not turn your backs on God. The same danger exists for us today as individuals, as a church, and as a nation. We can turn our back on God. And when we do, the same dire consequences will come upon us.

There are three things to remember to help us to stand fast in the Lord and not turn away from him. The first thing we need to remember, verse 1, or verse 3 to 5, is remember God's goodness. Or you might write down past goodness. He's going to tell them what God has done for them. Follow with me beginning in verse 5. He says, "And you have seen all that the Lord has done, the Lord your God has done." So he couches it in past tense. "And to all the nations that came because of you. For the Lord your God is He that does fight for you. He says, Behold, I have divided unto you by lot the nations that remain to an inheritance for your tribes and from the Jordan with all the nations that I have cut off even unto the great sea." Now the Jordan was on the east border And the great sea was the Mediterranean on the western side or border. Verse five, "And the Lord your God, he shall expel them from before you and drive them out from your sight, and ye shall possess your land as the Lord your God hath promised unto you." So notice in verse 3, "they had seen all that God had done." God had fought for them, God had prospered them, God had protected them, and they've come into their promised land, and they're dwelling in their inheritance.

Now this is a dangerous time. Whenever you are comfortable and things are going good and God has blessed you and God is prospering you, guess what, that's a dangerous time. Someone said it takes a steady hand to hold a full cup. How true that is. When God has blessed you and God is prospering you, keep your eyes on the Lord. It's a dangerous time. You can easily forget God and fall away from God during that time. God had blessed them. He parted the Red Sea and they went across on dry ground. God had brought them out of Egypt and God had protected them and provided for them in the wilderness. They had crossed the Jordan River on dry ground. The walls of Jericho came down by faith. The sun stood still and now God has given them rest. You talk about a blessed people. God had done all these miracles for them, but the danger is the next generation would forget all that God has done for them.

My fear is that my kids and my kids' kids and my kids' kids' kids, and on down the line, that they will forget the Lord and that they won't walk with the Lord. They don't follow the Lord and they don't stay devoted to the Lord. You know Christianity is only one generation from extinction. If we don't impart our love for God and our fear of God and our obedience to the word of God to our children and they to [their] children, then we're in big trouble, both as a nation and in our world today. So we need to recall all that God has done for us as well as Christians. Do you know that God saved you by his grace? You're not saved because you deserve it. You're not saved because you're good looking, sorry to pop your bubble there. You go and tell your pastor, "What did the pastor say?" He said, "I'm not good looking." Just wanted to encourage you. I said, "You're not saved because of that," even though you may be good looking. God didn't save you for your looks, okay? He goes, "Oh, thank you pastor." You're not saying because you're charismatic. You're not saying because you're wonderful, because of your gifts or talents or ability. You are saved by the grace of God; don't you ever, ever forget that. You know what that does? It humbles your heart. A true understanding of God's grace brings humility. I love the story of John Newton, the man who wrote the song Amazing Grace. He was a pastor and a preacher and as he would preach, he would say two things I know. Just before he died, when he got very old, he would get in his pulpit and say, I only know two things, number one, I'm a great sinner. And number two, Jesus is a great savior. That's awesome. I thought, Lord, help me

never to forget that. As I walk all these years with you and you've blessed my life so abundantly, help me never to forget that I'm a great sinner and you're a great savior. And then I'm saved by grace. So he wrote amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, don't you forget that? But now I'm found. I was blind, but now I see. Isn't God's grace amazing?

You know what, not only does he save you by his grace (congregation applauding) but God also keeps you by his grace and he sanctifies you by his grace. It is God's grace that keeps me from falling into sin and falling away from him. So he saves me by his grace, He sanctifies me by his grace, he sustains me by his grace. Salvation is all of the grace of God, and this should humble our hearts and causes to worship him. It's God's goodness that leads us to repentance, and his goodness is a fact of history seen in the cross of Jesus Christ. If you ever doubt the goodness of God, remember Jesus died on the cross for you. That's a forever example of the goodness of God. Remember when Nathan the prophet visited David after his great sin with Bathsheba? What did Nathan do? He reminded David of how good God had been to him. Why would you turn away from God? Why would you do this sinful thing? God has been so good to you. Remember the prodigal son who was in the pig pen? What brought him to his senses and caused him to return back to God? He said, "How many hired servants have my father with bread enough to spare. And I perished with hunger." He's like, "duh, I'm going to rise and I'm going to go back to my father. I'm going say, father, I've sinned against heaven and before I sight, I'm no longer worthy to be called thy son. Can I just be one of your hired servants?" And you know the beautiful story, the father wouldn't think of it and he ran to his son and he threw his arms around his son and he embraced him and he forgave him. He put shoes on him and a robe on him and a ring on him and he killed the fatted calf and they celebrated. The father said, "This my son that was lost is now found. He was dead and he is alive again." It was the goodness of the father that brought this prodigal wayward son back. Don't forget God's goodness.

There are times when I just am hit with how good God has been to me. I look back at when God saved me and I look back at how God led me And I look back at how God brought my wife and I together and the children he's given us and the grandchildren and the church to pastor and all the blessings that he's given me all these many years. And I can't help but just say, God, thank you. Thank you for your blessings. God, you're good. Why would I want to go back to my old life of emptiness and darkness and misery and loneliness and bondage and sin? God has blessed my life. So remember the goodness of God.

The second thing you need to remember to stand fast in the Lord is to remember your obligations, your obligations to God. Be courageous and be obedient to do what God has called you to do. Follow with me beginning there in verse six. He says, "be ye therefore...", indicating now let's put it into shoe leather. "Be therefore courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that you turn not aside, don't turn back, don't turn away, don't turn aside, from to the right hand or to the left, that you come not among those nations that remain among you, neither make mention of them, of their name, of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourself down to them. But what you should do...", verse

eight, "is cleave unto the Lord your God as you have done to this day." Why? "For the Lord hath driven out from before you this great nation strong, but as for you, no man hath been able to stand before you until this day. One man of you shall chase a thousand. For the Lord your God, he it is that fights for you, for you as he hath promised you." Verse 11, "But take good heed...", or be very careful, "therefore, unto yourselves, that you love the Lord your God."

So remembering God's goodness and what He has done for us brings to us a responsibility or an obligation. So He starts in verse six with a "therefore." You know, we live in a culture today that has forgotten the concept of responsibility. It's all privileges, it's all rights. We have rights for everyone and everything in the world today. But what about responsibilities? Privileges and blessings bring what? Responsibilities. So if you're a Christian and God has blessed you, you have a responsibility.

Now, there are three specific commands that if we follow from verse six to 11, they will keep us from falling or turning away from God. Notice them, the first is obey God's word, obey God's word. Go back with me to verse 6 and 7, "Be therefore very courageous" to do what? "To keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses. Don't turn from the right hand or to the left. And do not come among those nations that remain among you for they make mention of their gods. So don't talk about their gods, don't turn to their gods nor swear to them, nor serve them, nor bow yourselves down to them." Now this was the same word that God gave to Joshua. And now he's repeating in his old age. And by the way, Joshua is 110 right now. That's pretty cool, right? He's 110. Turn back with me to chapter 1 for just a moment. Notice in verse seven, what God had said to Joshua when he began his ministry and campaigned to conquer the promised land. Joshua chapter 1, verse 7, "Only be thou strong and very courageous that you may observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded you. Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left that thou mayest prosper in whatever you do." Notice verse 8, "This book of the law shall not depart from out of your mouth, but you will meditate therein day and night that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein, for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and thou shalt have good success." Turn back with me now to chapter 23. So what is Joshua supposed to do? Joshua is supposed to obey the word of God spoken by Moses. He's supposed to keep God's word. So Joshua is telling Israel now, you do the same thing. God told Joshua through Moses, keep my commandments, follow my word, and you will what? Prosper and God will bless you. And then what does he do when he's 110? Tells them the same thing. You want to be blessed, you want to prosper, keep, obey God's word.

You know, sometimes as an older person, myself, I look at young people and I go, "You know what, I wasn't born yesterday, and I know what I'm talking about." Would you just listen to me? And I remember my dad used to tell me the same thing. Remember when your dad or your mom would say, I wasn't born yesterday. I know what I'm talking about. And now the words are coming out of my mouth. Oh, this is scary. (congregation laughing) And I think, oh, if you'd just listened to me, I can help you here. I've been through high school. I've gone through the, you know, engagement, finding a wife, getting married, marriage, raising children, have grandchildren. I can tell you some things or two. I've been studying the Bible for a long time. I

know what the word says and I know what obedience to God can do for your life. Will you just listen to me? "Ah, you're an old man." You know, it's funny when you get old, you have all the answers but no one asks you the questions. Isn't that a bummer? When you're young, you think you have all the answers, but you don't know anything. You get old, you have all the answers, but no one asks you anymore, because you're just old. You don't want to talk to that old guy.

So here's Joshua, 110 years old, he goes, "Listen to me. I wasn't born yesterday." This is a fair phrase. "Do what I'm telling you, keep God's word. God will bless you. It happened to me. Over 45 years ago, God told me to obey him, keep his word, and God has blessed my life." This takes courage to obey God's word, amen? In our culture of relativity and no absolutes, it's a bold, courageous thing to stand and say, "This is true. This is right. This is wrong." Who says so? God does. Popular opinion, it's not our culture, it's not our modern age. We have a fixed point in God's word. This is what we've lost in our culture today. All the insanity going on and racism and you know terrorism and moral decay and you know gay marriage and on the list goes, all the moral issues that are going on. We have lost our fixed point. We've lost our fixed point. We have nothing to hang on to. We're like a ship out on the ocean at night without a compass, without a map, with no stars to guide us, nothing to know where to go, what to do. I've talked to college students, I ask them the question, do you believe in absolute truth? They go, "no." I say, you absolutely sure? Think about your answer now. They go, "Well maybe there's one absolute and that is that there's no absolutes." How convenient for you? They're absolutely sure that there are no absolutes or there's no truth. There's no fixed point. There's no transcendent God that sets the standard for us and has revealed them to us in his word. It's a matter of what God, it supersedes culture and time man's opinion, God has a fixed standard. God's given His word to us. Study that revelation of God. Obey God's word. And I promise you, it will bless your life. But it's going to take courage to stand in our culture.

The Bible is the standard and it keeps us from falling away. In verse 7, he indicates that, "If you follow my word and you obey God's word, you will not go to the other nations. You won't mention their gods, you won't serve them, you won't bow down to them." In Romans 12, Paul the apostle tells us as Christians, "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed...", how? "By the renewing of your minds." By the renewing of your minds, "that you may prove what is a good, perfect and acceptable will of God." I love what R. Kent Hughes says about this point. He says, "Bowing to the authority of God's word and obeying it will keep our heads and our hearts right. A mind filled with God's word can critically evaluate the secular society which surrounds it and resist assimilation. A mind filled with God's Word will be a mind of wisdom. Thus one of the vital signs of spiritual life is a regard for the Word of God." When I read that, I say, "Amen, amen, amen." A mind and a heart filled with God's Word and a life that is obedient to God's Word. Nothing more important. So you want keep from falling away, suffering the consequences, then you be obedient to God's Word.

The second thing you need to do to stay strong in the Lord is to cling to the Lord, verse 2, or verse 8 in this passage. Notice he says, "But, cleave unto the Lord your God, as you have done unto this day." Now that word cleave, it's in the Old Testament, so the Hebrew, is the same word in Genesis 2, verse 24. For this cause, I'm quoting the verse, "A husband or a man or wife, a

man shall leave his father and shall..." what? —"Cleave to his wife." Not wives. (congregation laughs) Wife. That's marriage, by the way. A man and a woman glued together by God. So you leave father and mother, which is, you know, you love them, you like them, but you do, it's a good idea to live with your wife when you get married, okay? And for a wife to live with her husband. You cleave to one another. The same word is now you cleave to the Lord. You're glued to the Lord. You hang on tight to the Lord. You grab a hold of the Lord. By the way, as important as the institution of marriage is, the most important relationship in your heart and life as a married person is God. It's not your spouse. If you want a strong marriage, you need a strong walk with God, amen. If you want your marriage to be strong, cleave to the Lord. [I] have people all the time come to me, their marriages are a mess, "Pastor, would you fix it? Can you do it in an hour?" (congregation laughing) I can tell you how to fix it. Might take more time. Obey God's word and cleave to the Lord. There's my marriage counsel. Just be obedient to God's word and cleave to him, love him with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. That is so very important.

When we cleave to the Lord, verse nine, what happens? We have victory over our enemies, I like that. "For the Lord has driven out from before you all the great nations strong, but is for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. You're going have victory when you cleave to the Lord. You're going have strength when you cleave to the Lord." Notice verse 10, he says, "One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God, he it is, that fights for you as he promised you." One man chasing a thousand, can you picture that? Now some say he's speaking hyperbole and that may be so, but he's still trying to convey an important point. One Israeli chasing a thousand and they're like, don't you ever come back either? And he's like, man, that is awesome. God will give you victory and strength. And in Psalm 63, verse 7 and 8, God will give you joy if you cling to him. "Thou hast been my help, and in the shadow of thy wings, I sing for joy my soul clings to you." What a great, great verse. I'm clinging to you and you fill me with your joy.

There's a third thing we need to do if we're going to obey God and not fall away, notice in verse 11, and that is we need to love God. We need to love God. So how can I be courageous and strong and keep his commandments? I love him. Notice in verse 11, "take good heed...", or literally in the Hebrew, it is "be very careful unto yourself that you love the Lord your God." Be careful that you love the Lord your God. If we love God, we will not do anything inconsistent with that love. Why would I lie? I love God. I don't want to hurt God. Why would I steal something? I love God, I don't want to hurt God. Why would I commit adultery? I love God, I don't want to hurt God. I don't want to grieve the Holy Spirit. The Bible actually says, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby you were sealed into the day of redemption." And one of the number one things that grieve the Holy Spirit is speech that is unlovely, unbecoming, doesn't glorify God. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good to the use of edifying or building up others. So I need to love God. I need to cling to God and I need to obey God. Deuteronomy 6 verse 4 to 5, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy might." And then it goes on to say, and "thy neighbor as thyself." Now I love the love God part, but God did you have to throw that neighbor bit in there? You don't know my neighbor. Dude is tweaked man, he's messed up. Do I have to love my neighbor? If I'm going to love God, you can't not love your neighbor. Listen, if you want

your horizontal relationships to be in sync, marriage, friends, family, neighbor, coworkers, if you want things to be in sync, guess what? Get your vertical relationship to God right. If you're out of sync or kilter with your God, then it's going to throw off all your relationships with people around you. So get right with God and other relationships into sync. So are you loving the Lord with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind?

Now there's a last main point or third main point that I want to make and that's in verse 12 and that is we need to remember the consequences if we decide to turn from God and go back. So this section of Joshua's speech is an admonition. It's a warning. If you do turn back, these are the consequences. Follow with me, verse 12. He says, "Or else if you do in any wise go back and you cleave...", same word, but you're cleaving "unto the remnant of those nations, even those that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them and go in unto them and they unto you, know for certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out those nations from before you, but they shall be snares and traps unto you, scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes." That doesn't sound good, right? That sounds painful. So if I turn away from God, I'm going to experience pain and bondage, "until you perish from off this good land." Notice the emphasis there, "as God has been good." He gave you a good land, "which the Lord your God hath given to you. And behold this day, I am going the way of all the earth." He's talking about death. Everyone dies. It's appointed unto every man who wants to die. "And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing have failed of all the good things which your Lord God spoke concerning you." Notice the surety and reliability and faithfulness of God keeping his promises. Not one thing that God spoke to you has failed. God always keeps his promises. That's why we can trust him. "And has come to pass unto you. Not one thing has failed thereof." Verse 15, "Therefore it shall come to pass that as all good things are come upon you, which the Lord your God hath promised you, So shall the Lord bring you and all these evil things until he has destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you."

So there's a contrast in verse 15. The good things that come from cleaving to the Lord, obeying the Lord and loving the Lord and remembering the goodness of the Lord are the evil things that will come upon you if you turn away from him. Then verse 16, "And when you have transgressed the covenant of the Lord, your God, which he has commanded you, and you have gone and served other gods, and you bow down yourself to them, then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off this good land which you have been given unto you." So it's time to choose, verse 15, the good or the evil. If you go back or fall away, notice the consequences. Verse 12, your family life will be affected. He says there in verse 12 that you're not to intermarry with those other nations that are around you. I believe the application for us is quite clear. You know when you turn away from God, it's going to affect your marriage. It's going to affect your marriage. I look at the heartache of a Christian couple and one, the husband or the wife, backslide. I can't tell you the pain that I see in a person's face when they come. See, my husband is turned away from the Lord or my wife's turned away from God and there's no fellowship in our marriage anymore. That's a painful thing. And if you turn away from God, it's going to affect your marriage. That'll have an effect on your kids. It'll have an effect on the church, and have effect on our community and our world and our nation.

You know the building blocks of society, are first marriage and the family. Another building block is the church, we're the salt of the earth, the light of the world. The marriage strengthens the church and the church is to strengthen marriages. But if you fall away from God and you turn your back on God, then it's going to affect that relationship. It's also going to bring you back into bondage of sin, verse 13, "You become trapped by your old sins." As I pointed out, it'll become a snare, a trap, scourges in your sides and thorns in your eyes. So many times a person can be set free and he's following the Lord and he walks with God for years but he forgets the goodness of God. He forgets his responsibility to obey God and to cling to God and to love God. He turns away from God and guess what happens? He goes right back into his old sinful ways. He comes back into the bondage of alcohol or drugs or sexual immorality or anger or hate or greed. A list could go on and on and on. Those sins that God has delivered you from, those sins that God has set you free, if you're not careful, you can slip right back into them. Bible says, "Don't be entangled in the yoke of bondage, for Christ has set you free." Whether it be legalism or license, don't go back to the sinful ways of the past. Stand fast in the freedom and the liberty that Christ has given to you. It'll not only affect your family life, it'll bring you back into bondage of sin, but you will miss out on the blessings of God. Again, in verse 14 and 15, He uses the phrase "good things," good things, good things. I can guarantee that if you put into practice these points today, because they're from God's word, your life will be blessed. I didn't say easy. I didn't say smooth. So don't freak out on me when your car won't start. "Car won't start, that pastor told me if I read my Bible and go to church everything's going be fine." My car won't start and I'm a pastor. Welcome to life. But you won't have to get out and kick it anymore and cuss and swear and get into bondage and freak out and get mad. You can just go, "Well, praise the Lord, he's got another plan, or he knows what he's doing, or Lord, I trust you, or Lord, I thank you, I'm going to heaven, my car isn't going to work, but I'm going to heaven, you know." (congregation laughing) Amen. (congregation applauding) You just start counting your blessings. But you can trust the Lord, he takes care of you, God has been good to me. As Joshua actually looked back over his life, he's saying, you know, "obey God, cling to God, love God." God took care of Joshua. Seven years of conquest and fighting, and Joshua came out unscathed, and he still had a smile on his face, and he loved the Lord. Psalm 1 says, "Blessed is the man or the woman that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly. Doesn't stand in the way of sinners, and doesn't sit in the seat of the scornful. But his or her delight is in the law of the Lord. And in that law, they meditate day and night. And they'll be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water whose leaf shall not weather and everything they do will prosper." And then the Psalm takes a turn and says, "not so the ungodly, but they're like the chaff, which the wind drives away. They won't stand in the congregation of the sinners." And then God says at the end of that Psalm that "they will be like chaff thrown to the fire and destroyed."

So you got two choices. You got two choices. You cling to the Lord, you obey the Lord, you love the Lord and God will bless your life. Or you forget God's blessing, you turn away from God, you go back into bondage and you suffer the evil things that will come upon you. Psalm 34a says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." Blessed is the man who trusts in him, amen. God will bless your life. You don't want to end up worshiping and serving other gods. Verse 16, you want to love God and serve God all your life and God will be with you. He'll never leave you and he'll never forsake you and he will bless you. Now my question in closing is twofold. Number one,

have you tasted and seen the Lord is good? Have you tasted and seen the Lord is good? Is he good? Amen. Why would you want to turn away from Him? And if you have tasted and seen the Lord is good, then never drift away. Remember the goodness of God. Remember your obligations to love Him, serve Him, obey Him, cleave to Him, and remember the consequences if you don't. Let's pray.