



This morning we continue our series in the book of Joshua and we start a new section in the book. In chapters 1-12 we see Israel, led by Joshua, conquering the promised land. It's been fast-paced, action-packed and drama-filled. We've covered many important themes in this book. We've learned that the people of God must be strong and courageous and not afraid when we face our battles. We've seen how God is faithful to fulfill his promises. He is sovereign. We've been encouraged to be people full of faith and who trust God to do the impossible. We've also been warned about the disastrous costs of disobedience and sin. We've struggled through the hard passages where entire towns are destroyed. And we've learned over and over again about the tension between faith and obedience.

In chapters 13-21 the action slows considerably. In these chapters Joshua divides the land among the 12 tribes of Israel. Joshua's task shifts from leading the Israelites into battle to leading them to settle into their portions of land. I need to be honest with you and say that these chapters can be really boring because we'll be looking at ancient land surveys. But, if we can get inside the thinking and the mind of an Israelite during this time, we'll see just how important and significant these chapters are to their lives and to ours.

Sadly, a few weeks ago I lost my uncle who was battling a myriad of health issues. He was only 55 years old but lived a rock-and-roll lifestyle that finally caught up with him. Thankfully, I was able to spend some time with him before he passed away. Growing up without a father, my uncle became a father figure to me and my brother. He taught us how to fish and ride dirt bikes. He loved Mustangs and because of him I bought a 1965 Mustang in college. He wasn't a rich man by any means, but in his will he left me one of his prized possessions: a 2005 Harley Davidson Softail. It was an inheritance gift. Maybe you have received an inheritance. I never have, so this is a first for me. I thought about the bike this week because the word "inheritance" in these two chapters is stated 15 times and 44 times in chapters 11-24. Inheritance is a major theme in the book of Joshua and a very important word. But what was Israel's inheritance and why was it important? And, as followers of Jesus Christ, what is our inheritance and how do we enjoy it? That's what I want us to look at this morning.

### **Land Still to be Taken**

When Joshua had grown old, the Lord said to him, "You are now very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.

"This is the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and Geshurites, from the Shihor River on the east of Egypt to the territory of Ekron on the north, all of it counted as Canaanite though held by the five Philistine rulers in Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron; the territory of the Avvites on the south; all the land of the Canaanites, from Arah of the Sidonians as far as Aphek and the border of the Amorites; the area of Byblos; and all Lebanon to the east, from Baal Gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo Hamath.

"As for all the inhabitants of the mountain regions from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, that is, all the Sidonians, I myself will drive them out before the Israelites. Be sure to allocate this land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have instructed you, and divide it as an inheritance among the nine tribes and half of the tribe of Manasseh" (Josh. 13:1-7).

At this point Joshua has successfully completed two-thirds of his divine commission from God to take the land. He's persevered through seven years of tough military battles and is now in control of the most major cities of Canaan. Joshua, a much older man now, needs to finish the task and divide the land up so each tribe can claim their inheritance and enjoy the gift from God. It might be helpful for us visual learners to see how the land was divided up (*picture of land*). If you can see that, you'll notice various allotments of land on both the east and west sides of the Jordan river. The promised land was divided into 12 parts representing the 12 tribes of Israel. Ten tribes were immediate descendants of Jacob and the other two tribes were the sons of Joseph. We learn that the tribe of Levi got no land because they served as priests and God was their inheritance. Instead they were given specific towns, about 29 if I remember right, but they didn't own the territory. Their city resided inside a territory that belonged to another tribe.

We learn too that there were lands still left to be conquered, territories of the Philistines and their neighbors in the south, the Phoenician coastland to the north (v. 4) and the northern mountainous territories of Lebanon (verses 5-6). The land was divided by lot (aka lottery) and instructions were given to Moses earlier and Joshua followed up with them. Dividing the land by lot was

to ensure the outcome was completely in the hands of the Lord. That's about how far into the weeds I'd like to get in terms of the distribution of land.

There's one observation that strikes me as I look at these verses—we never completely arrive in this life. Joshua is an old man, close to 100 years old by this time and God is still working on him. When Joshua first took over the reins from Moses, he was fired up, strong and focused. Now he's a time-tested and battle-scarred man. Leadership has taken its toll on him. He's not the young buck he once was, but his work is not yet complete. He seems to be running out of time and energy but still has to divide up the land. Battles still need to be fought, but he won't be the one fighting. Instead each tribe will be responsible for driving out the inhabitants and taking their land. As I get older, I'm slowly, and I mean slowly, starting to see this reality. My hair is getting grayer. I don't have the energy I once had. I can still beat my son one-on-one at basketball, but he's only 12 and I'm exhausted afterwards! So, it's probably a good thing that I'm realizing some of my own limitations.

Joshua is seeing his limitations as well but he doesn't get discouraged. Why? Verse 6 says, ***"I myself will drive them out."*** The great promise of God, one Joshua has been leaning on for years, is it's really God's work. The ongoing work of possessing the inheritance is God's responsibility, not Joshua's. It rests in God's hands. God alone will carry out the promise. He will give each tribe the strength and resources they need to take the land and claim their inheritance. And it seems to me that Joshua is fully aware of this.

The same is true in the Christian life. You never arrive. We never come to the point and say, "Well, I'm done maturing in Christ. God has no more work to do here. I'm now the person I've always wanted to be and I've accomplished all I've wanted to do for God!" That's crazy talk. In Philippians 3:13-14 Paul says, ***"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."***

What has Paul not yet taken hold of? What is the prize and the goal he is aiming for? It's knowing Jesus Christ more intimately and more closely. It's becoming more like Christ. The Christian life is not just about what you do for Jesus; it's about your relationship with Him. If you think you've arrived, think again. If you're frustrated with how slowly you're arriving, don't be discouraged, don't give up; God is not done with you! How's your heart? How's your soul? How's your relationship with Jesus? Nothing is more important.

Let's look next at God's work in another man of faith—Caleb. I'm going to skip lots of exciting land allotments to get to the inheritance given to Caleb.

## **Caleb—A Picture of God's Faithfulness**

Now the people of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt in fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly.'

"Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said."

Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly. (Hebron used to be called Kiriath Arba after Arba, who was the greatest man among the Anakites.)

Then the land had rest from war (Josh. 14:6-15).

Joshua chapter 14 and the beginning of 15 focus on an 85-year-old man of faith named Caleb. I could do an entire sermon about Caleb. When Caleb was about 40 years old, Moses sent him along with 12 other men to spy out the land of Canaan (Num. 13-14). When the group returned, only Caleb and Joshua had faith that God could take the land. The rest were paranoid about the "giants" in the land who seemed too mighty to conquer. God, through Moses, promised Caleb and his family the land he spied out because he "followed me (God) fully" (Num. 14:24). Forty-five years later, Caleb approaches his dear friend and mentor Joshua and reminded him of the promise God made him. Caleb recalled God's promises to Joshua. Joshua blessed him and granted him his inheritance—the land of Hebron.

One of the reasons I love Caleb is because at 85 years old, he didn't ask for an easy task, one suited for an old dude. He asked Joshua for the rugged hill country to climb and giants to conquer! He wanted to climb some mountains and drive out giant warriors from Anak. I love it! For him 85 was the new 40! One of the secrets to Caleb's life is found in a phrase repeated several

times in the Old Testament about him, *“he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly”* (Josh.14:14). Wholeheartedly means with all your heart. Caleb gave himself up to God with everything he had, with all his heart. Instead of retiring to Auburn and golfing for the rest of his life, Caleb says, “God, I’m not done and I know you still can use me, let’s go.”

What about you? Are you serving God wholeheartedly? Jesus called us to this type of lifestyle if we are going to be his disciple. Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with half of your heart and with some of your soul and with a portion of your mind.” That’s not what he said, right? God wants **all** of your heart, because if he has all of your heart, he has all of you. Truth is, many of us love God with divided hearts. We serve him when it’s convenient. We promise to serve him with our whole hearts when life gets less busy. Does life ever get less busy? Some of us need to confess our divided hearts to God and commit to giving him all our heart today.

Like Joshua, like Caleb, for those of you who are older—60, 70 and above—no matter how old you become, you never retire from trusting the Lord and serving him. God still wants to use you! You still have mountains to climb and giants to fight! I think about this old geezer, Frank Cutter, one of our elders! He could have easily coasted into retirement and told God, “Hey, I’ve put in my time at church, you owe me now!” But instead, he is serving God by shepherding you. He’s chosen to trust God and be a part of transitioning the North Campus into NewNorth. He’s a Caleb. I think about Mona and Win Jew who are two of the busiest retirees we have around here. Yes, they travel and love on their grandkids but they both are heavily involved in ministry. Mona and Win are Calebs. I think about Jennifer Lum Yee, our worship deacon, who serves our church tirelessly. She’s a Caleb. How about Marianne Breaux, who makes coffee most Sundays? I don’t even know her age and I won’t ask because it’s rude! But, she has a ton of energy serving the Lord. I could go on and on and tell you about these dear saints and many others here at North who have withstood the test of time, who are serving Jesus faithfully and well into their golden years. They are all Calebs. And I think all of them would say, “I’m doing this for the Lord and the best is yet to come!”

An inheritance is a good thing. I’m excited about my Harley. My mom is bringing it down on a trailer during Thanksgiving week and I’ll take it for a ride in honor of my Uncle Rob. But you know what? Even though I’ve always wanted a Harley, I’d much rather have my uncle around. I’d give it back in a heartbeat just to go fishing one more time with him. As I think about my relationship with God, I hope the same is true. Yes, I love when God answers my prayers, I love all the ways he blesses my family, I enjoy all that he has promised me, but more than anything, I want him, not his stuff.

As we consider the inheritance of land given to all the Israelites, I think the same is true. Israel, and all who read this record, are reminded that at the end of the day, the land itself was little more than dirt. It wasn’t ultimately fulfilling. Yes, it does represent the promises kept by God, but it is God himself, apart from the land, who is the ultimate true prize.

Here’s my big idea: Receiving God’s promises are great but receiving the promise-giver is the greatest. If you look back in these chapters, four times we’re told that the Levites were given no inheritance of land because the Lord was their inheritance, *“But to the tribe of Levi, Moses had given no inheritance; the Lord, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as he promised them”* (Josh. 13:33). Yes, the land is important, but the true prize is God himself. Commentator Kenneth Matthews put it this way, “The primary object of God’s gift of the land is Israel’s life with him. The land is his, and it is where he dwells among his people. The relationship with God is the true value of the inheritance they enjoy.” To put it another way, receiving God’s promises are great but receiving the promise-giver is the greatest. It’s all about the relationship we can enjoy.

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, he has given you an inheritance. He has given you eternal life, he’s given you his great and precious promises, he’s left you with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, and he promises you heaven. Those are all great promises to inherit. But, like Israel, the temptation is to be preoccupied with the gift (the land) rather than the giver (God). More than anything, our inheritance is Jesus himself and life with him. Jesus is your reward. Jesus is yours to enjoy now and forever in eternity.

Chuck Swindoll told the following story of a man he visited in a dismal veterans hospital:

*The day I arrived to visit, I saw a touching scene. This man had a young son, and during his confinement in the hospital, he had made a little wooden truck for his boy. Since the boy was not allowed to go into the ward and visit his father, an orderly had brought the gift down to the child, who was waiting in front of the hospital with his mother. The father was looking out of a fifth-floor window, watching his son unwrap the gift.*

*The little boy opened the package, and his eyes got wide when he saw that wonderful little truck. He hugged it to his chest.*

*Meanwhile, the father was walking back and forth waving his arms behind the windowpane, trying to get his son’s attention.*

*The little boy put the truck down and reached up and hugged the orderly and thanked him for the truck. And all the while the frustrated father was going through these dramatic gestures, trying to say, “It’s me, son. I made the truck for you. I gave that to you. Look up here!” I could almost read his lips.*

*Finally the mother and the orderly turned the boy's attention up to that fifth-floor window. It was then the boy cried, "Daddy! Oh, thank you! I miss you, Daddy! Come home, Daddy. Thank you for my truck."*

*And the father stood in the window with tears pouring down his cheeks.*

*How much like that child we are.*

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are his adopted sons and daughters. Your ultimate inheritance is not only eternal life, his promises, the Holy Spirit, or heaven, it's life with Jesus. It's a life

right here and right now. It's a journey of faith where you grow and mature more like Jesus Christ. But, if like Job God would take all his blessings away, would Jesus alone be enough for you? Are you content playing with the toy truck when Jesus calls you to himself? Do you want the promise-giver more than his promises? Do you want Jesus more than his stuff? That's a challenge for us all to consider today.

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

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