

God's Servants Die but God's Work Continues (Joshua 24:29-33, 1 Corinthians

3:5-10)

30-Aug-26

Joshua 24:29-33

Buried in the Promised Land

²⁹ After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of a hundred and ten. ³⁰ And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

³¹ Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel.

³² And Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants.

³³ And Eleazar son of Aaron died and was buried at Gibeah, which had been allotted to his son Phinehas in the hill country of Ephraim.

1 Corinthians 3:5-10

⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. ⁹ For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care.

There are **Bibles** in front of you

And a sermon **outline**

I encourage to have your **Bibles opened** up at **Joshua chapter 24 – starting at verse 29.**

Let's pray...

Intro/Servant?

So here we are at the end of the book of Joshua – and chapter 24.

We looked at the first 28 verses of chapter 24 last week

And we said that Joshua was at the end of his life and he finished well – and wanted to make sure his fellow Israelites were committed to the Lord God YHWH of Israel

And we had that famous quote from Joshua in verse 15 where he said - “*As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord*”

And it's fair to say that Joshua was a **faithful servant of the Lord**.

It's worth us **defining a servant** before we continue.

[Slide-Definition – Servant]

In the Bible – the Hebrew Word for servant “ebed” [עֶבֶד] – means a slave to a master - someone who submits to the authority and rule of a king - a worshipper of God - and an ambassador of God called and sent by God to do some service for God.

Joshua fits all of those definitions.

He was a faithful servant!

What do faithful servants of the Lord look like?

[Slide-1st Point]

1st point – **Faithful Servants Finish the Race Well**

Here in vv29-33 we have **THREE faithful servants** who finish their race well!

Faithful Servants Finish The Race Well (Joshua 24:29-33)

The First servant - in v29 – we read that **Joshua** died at age 110 and he is described as a **Servant of the Lord!**

He could have been described as a great and successful military leader – but the most important thing to God is that Joshua was a “**Servant of the Lord**”

If we reflect on Joshua’s life we see:

- He had **faith** and trusted in God’s promises
- He had **courage** even when facing the fierce occupants of the land of Canaan
- He was **obedient** in following God’s instructions
- He was **humble** recognizing that it was God who fought for the Israelites in each battle they had
- He was a **faithful leader** leading the people like Moses did
- He remained **committed** to the Lord throughout his life
- He showed **concern for the next generation** – repeatedly challenging the Israelites to remain faithful and committed to the Lord.

Joshua finished well – and finished the race that God had marked out for him.

The job God gave Joshua to do – to take and occupy the Promised Land is now complete. And Joshua is buried in the land he inherited (v30)

And to get some idea of how faithful a servant Joshua is

We read in v31 – *that the Israelites served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the lifetime of the elders who outlived Joshua*. This was a generation of Israelites who had been well led by Joshua – who had set them a fine example of obedience – and so they faithfully served the Lord.

Well done good and faithful servant, Joshua!

The Second servant - we have is **Joseph**.

Now remember, over 400 years earlier – Joseph – one of Jacob’s 12 sons – had been mistreated by his brothers – and sold to be a slave in Egypt. But God was with Joseph – and despite being wrongly accused and put in jail. Through a remarkable chain of events - - in which Joseph interpreted the Pharaoh of Egypt’s dreams – and with God’s help - Joseph was able to predict that Egypt would enjoy 7 years of good crops and then suffer 7 years of famine. Pharaoh’s reward to Joseph was to make Joseph Prime Minister of Egypt and give Joseph the job of handling the distribution of food during the 7 years of famine. In God’s grace, Joseph was able to save the people of Egypt from starvation and even save his own family from famine back in Canaan – and Joseph was reconciled to his family – who all came and lived in Egypt with him.

So, Joseph too, was a faithful servant of God – and trusted God through many hardships – and he too finished the race God marked out for him.

Joseph also believed in God’s promise of land to his great grandfather, Abraham, and believed God’s promise of land to his grandfather Isaac – and God’s promise of land to his father Jacob – that one day the land of Canaan would be his families’ inheritance.

Joseph's faith in God's promise was so strong that back in Genesis 50:22-26 – Joseph made his family promise to carry his bones out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

Later on in Moses' time – when God rescued the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt – Moses took Joseph's bones out of Egypt as they made their way to the Promised Land.

Now here we are at the end of Joshua's life – and Joseph's bones have been preserved for over 400 years – and they are now buried at Shechem in a plot of land that Joseph's father Jacob had bought centuries earlier!

A couple of things worth noting...

Firstly – God's promises are fulfilled in His own perfect timing which is different to our timing. And when God delays fulfilling promises it's not a failure, it's because certain things have to happen in the right order first. And it's perfectly fine for God promises to be fulfilled long after the person who originally received the promise has died. Neither Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses or Aaron saw or lived in the Promised Land – but they all believed God would keep His promise!

As Jesus Himself says “***blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed***” (John 20:29)

Secondly – Shechem is the perfect place for Joseph's bones to be buried.

Shechem is where God originally promised Abraham that his descendants would live in the Promised Land. Shechem is the place where Joseph's father, Jacob, built an altar. Shechem is the place where Jacob called his household to put away their foreign gods and only worship the Lord God YHWH.

Shechem is a very holy place!

Isn't God amazing the way – He has such attention to detail – even ensuring Joseph's bones get to where they are meant to be – and preserving them for centuries.

The Third servant is **Eleazar** – **the High Priest** – the Son of Aaron - the first High Priest. Eleazar has been with Joshua all the way through his leadership. Eleazar is the one who anointed Joshua and the one that Joshua came to when he needed to consult the Lord. Eleazar would use those God-given mysterious stones – Urim and Thummim – to obtain decisions from God.

There is something quite poignant about these three deaths being recorded together here at the end of the book of Joshua.

It marks the fulfillment of God's promises of land to the Israelites and the fulfillment of God's promise of rest from their enemies.

Also, these three servants ALL point to Jesus in some way...

Joseph saved the people of Egypt and Canaan from starvation – this points us to Jesus - who saves those who believe in His death for the forgiveness of their sins and believe in His resurrection for eternal life people – and saves them from sin, death and Satan

Then **Joshua** led his people safely and successfully to the Promised Land – this points to Jesus who leads His people safely to the Eternal Promised Land of Heaven!

The **Eleazar** was the High Priest responsible for making sacrifices on behalf of the people for their sins – this points to Jesus – our Great High Priest – who not only made the once and for all sacrifice for sin – He IS the actual one true perfect sacrifice for sin!

The death/burial of these three faithful servants – cries out for a leader who will not stay dead – who will not remain in the grave – but can defeat even death itself – and offer eternal life.

(pause)

Can we see the way God works throughout history though?

When Joseph died – eventually God sent Moses to rescue His people out of Egypt

When Moses died – God raised up Joshua to lead the people into the Promised Land.

When Aaron died – God raise up Eleazar to be the next Priest.

Here in Joshua 24

We have the record of Joseph, Joshua and Eleazar's burials.

But neither God's promises nor God's work got buried with them.

God's servants die – but God's work continues!

God's servants are temporary, but God's promises and God's work are permanent.

Application:

For us:

We shouldn't measure the success of our service to God - by how long we personally remain involved.

We are servants, not indispensable people.

To be called a **Servant of the Lord** is the greatest privilege we can have!

Because we are serving our Lord and Saviour and God. The greatest and most perfect master we could possibly have!

And remember Jesus Himself was a Servant King!

He did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many!

If Jesus' life was totally sacrificial – then as servants of our Lord Jesus – we can have no greater honour than to also serve sacrificially!

And even when Jesus died, was buried, rose again and ascended to Heaven.

God's work still continued! Jesus left His Word and He also sent the Holy Spirit to enable and equip people to serve God and continue His work...

Which brings us to...

[Slide-2nd point]

2nd point – **Faithful Servants Only Serve; God Gives the Growth!**

Faithful Servants Only Serve; God Gives the Growth (1 Corinthians 3:5-10)

In our NT passage from 1 Corinthians 3:5-10

[Please turn there now]

The Apostle Paul is writing to a Greek Church in Corinth.

Where Paul says they are acting worldly and not spiritually (v3)

He says there is jealousy and quarrelling amongst the people in the Church.

Paul says - some people are following Paul and some are following another leader/teacher called Apollos. Rather than following Jesus!

We pick up the passage at verse 5

Where Paul says

“What after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul?”

The answer?

ONLY SERVANTS – that’s it!

Only Servants - through whom the people of Corinth came to believe in Jesus.

Paul use an agricultural example – Paul says v6 – ***Paul planted the seed [of the Gospel], and Apollos watered [that seed] – BUT – It was God who made the church grow and who made people believe in Jesus!***

Paul goes on to say - v7 – ***Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is ANYTHING – BUT ONLY GOD WHO MAKES THINGS GROW.***

Paul goes onto to say v8 – the planter and the waterer have one purpose that God has given them – and they will be rewarded accordingly.

And v9 – Paul makes the important point that – ***we are co-workers in God’s service.***

Application

For us

We need to understand that any ministry in our Church – **is God's Work** - not ours – **we are merely God's instruments** – **we are ONLY SERVANTS** – nothing more!

In Church, there should be - no masters – no egos – no Lording it over people – we are simply servants of our Lord.

Even if we head up a ministry – we are still “**only servants**”

Even if we are a minister or an elder - we are still “**only servants**”

Once we think we are the boss - or once we think that we've made it – we are in bother!

Now - if God is the ONE who gives the growth – as Paul says He is – then **God will raise up more servants to continue His work**

As the Apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

God will complete the work He started – in His own good way - and His own good timing!

Nonetheless – it doesn't mean we are not involved.

If we think about how God's work continued in Israel.

We saw how Moses passed on the baton of leadership to Joshua

And how Aaron passed on the baton of Priesthood to Eleazar

My third point is– **Faithful Servants Pass on the Baton**

[Slide-3rd point]

If we look at the Apostle Paul's example – in his letter to Timothy - in 2 Timothy 2:2

Paul tells Timothy

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

Faithful Servants Pass on the Baton (2 Timothy 2:2)

So the process is...

Paul passes the baton to Timothy

Timothy passes on the baton to reliable people who are qualified to teach

And these reliable teachers pass the baton to others!

So, it's Biblical for us to be thinking about who we might pass the baton to – and to ask ourselves...

Who are we preparing to continue God's work?

For example:

We have a young girl – Chey – training as a trainee leader at Friday Jaffa.

We have children here – and in 10 years' time – they will be adults – perhaps they will be the next Sunday Jaffa teachers or the next Scripture Teachers

Next year – God willing - we will have Zach here – training for the ministry – he's the next generation. It's my prayer we have many more Zachs.

Whatever ministry we are involved in – it's Biblical to be praying and asking God to show us some more "Timothy's" to pass the baton on to!

As an older congregation we also have a wealth of wisdom and experience – we can pass on!

Remember - we're not indispensable – God's work continues long after we're gone.

Toukley Presbyterian Church started over 70 years ago!

The first minister – Rev McNeil Saunders - was Elaine Helyard's father.

There have been many ministers since him – and I pray many more after I am long gone!

God's servants die but God's work continues!

(pause)

[Slide-4th Point]

And the last point – **Faithful Servants Pray for the Next Generation**

Faithful Servants Pray for the Next Generation (Matthew 9:37-38)

As we look around our church family – we haven't got too many people that fall into the category of the **next generation**!

And yet – we have many people in our nation – and many in our local community – who don't know or follow Jesus.

That's not a new problem

When Jesus appointed His 12 apostles

He said this in Matthew 9:37

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few!”

Sounds pretty much like our problem too!

Jesus' answer to that problem is quite simple

V38 – Jesus says:

“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field”

We cannot control the future of God's church—but as faithful servants - we can all **pray** to the Lord of the Harvest.

Conclusion

To finish up then...

Joseph died. Joshua died. Eleazar died. Paul died. Apollos died. Every servant of God is temporary—but the God we serve is eternal and permanent. The Gospel Good News of Jesus continues, and His work goes on. So let us faithfully serve, faithfully pass on the baton, and faithfully pray—trusting in the God who gives the growth.

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, help us to be faithful servants who finish the race marked out for us, well! Help us to persevering in serving the Lord, knowing He is the one who causes the growth. Help us to be faithful in passing on the baton to the next generation; and help us to faithfully pray for the next generation so that more and more come to believe and follow Jesus! In Jesus Name. Amen.

Benediction (Colossians 3:23-24)

²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Amen.