

Joshua Part 17: The Lord is Your Inheritance

1. Review/Overview of Joshua, promised land and the Christian life.
 - a. A man had a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital. He was limited on the visitors and his family was told to get him excited. While in the hospital, a rich uncle of his died and left him a million dollars. His family wondered how to break the news to him with the least amount of excitement. It was decided to ask his pastor if he would go and break the news quietly to the man. The pastor went, and gradually led up to the question. The pastor asked the man what he would do if he inherited a million dollars. He said, 'I think I would give half of it to the church.' The pastor dropped dead.
 - b. The word inheritance is used more than fifty times in the second half of the book of Joshua. It's a very important word.
 - i. The Jews inherited their land. They didn't win it as a prize of warfare, or purchase it in a business transaction.
 - ii. The Lord himself was the sole owner of the land, and in a sense he leased it to them.
 - iii. Listen to God's instructions from Leviticus 25:23: "*The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.*" Imagine God being your landlord!
 - iv. Jesus emphasized this as well in one of His parables when he talked about the parable of the landlord in Matthew 21. Ultimately, God is declaring whatever He gives us was His, is His, and remains His. **God's gifts aren't to be treasured above Himself!**
 - c. Which is the lead into this morning's message:
2. **Joshua 13:32-33** "*These are the territories which Moses apportioned for an inheritance in the plains of Moab, beyond the Jordan at Jericho to the east. 33 But to the tribe of Levi, Moses did not give an inheritance; the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as He had promised to them.*"
 - a. Parallel Passages
 - i. Numbers 18:20 "*The LORD said to Aaron, "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites."*
 - b. The Levites (sons of Levi, which were Aaron and Moses' tribe) were set aside to be the priests and caretakers of the Ark of the Covenant (the gold covered box that the Israelites carried around in the desert). They also were assigned the task of offering sacrifices on behalf of the people and to care for the sacred items in worship.
 - c. And it is this tribe of about 25,000 men (more with women and children) that God gives a peculiar assignment in the "will" or inheritance. He tells them that they don't get none! (none in the physical, practical sense of the word).
 - i. No land. No property to pass on from one generation to the next.
 - ii. No source of wealth or wealth building – because it was land that increased one's wealth because from land you could raise livestock and crops that would continue to increase in value as they multiplied.
3. **Why would God do such a thing?** Why would He leave an entire tribe without an inheritance or a permanent place in the land they were?
 - a. We need a piece of history first. Back in the desert, while they were traveling toward the mountain of God, they were gathered around the mountain. God told them
 - b. Exodus 19:3-6 "*Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'*"

- i. Ultimately, the people refused this calling, preferring that Moses take the risks of entering God's presence. In chapter 20 of Exodus, the people relinquish that calling. Fearing of God as they have observed the tremendous calamities as the LORD spoke to Moses, they install Moses as priest on their behalf, saying, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die" 20:19
 - ii. They failed in their calling both as a nation and a kingdom.
 - iii. So with the establishment of the Levitical Priesthood, one tribe was set apart to represent the other eleven before God.
- c. So why did God not give them a physical inheritance?
- i. I believe this is because God did not want them to be caught up with the accumulation of wealth or possessions or the things of this world, but to be completely focused upon serving the Lord God in worship.
 - ii. While at first glance it might seem that the Levites missed out, in truth they inherited something of infinitely greater value.
 1. While the rest of Israel inherited a land, the Levites inherited the Lord. God Himself became their inheritance, their portion and lot, and what was God's, He shared with them.
 2. **The Levites not only inherited God, but also all that was His became theirs.** What of this creation could even begin to compare with the unspeakable riches of possessing God? (THEY ALSO GOT TO SHARE IN THE SACRIFICES, ETC)
 3. Does this sound familiar to anything in the Christian life?
 - iii. Let me point out a few more parallels:
 1. They had to be spread out among all the Israelites, not just centered in the place of worship. They were to be the teachers of the Law, reminding the people of who their God was. The **Levites were to be salt and light** by living among the other 11 tribes! They were to live and proclaim and teach righteousness and right living.
 2. **They were to minister to God.** They would carry around the presence of God that was symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant. Sound familiar? (we carry around the Presence of God in vessels that are infinitely more valuable than a gold lined box!)
 - a. **Christians:** There is the sacrifice of praise. The writer of Hebrews urged us to, *Continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name* (Heb 13:15).
 3. **They intervened on behalf of men.** As priests they offered sacrifices and served as "intermediaries" between God and Man.
 - a. **Christians:** We too intervene on behalf of a lost and dying world by intercession, witnessing and making Christ known as the Good News!
 - i. Intercession – they literally have the ministry of a "bleeding heart" on behalf of others so that they might know the broken heart of God for them.
 - ii. *"supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men"* (1st Timothy 2:1)
4. The bible teaches something called the Priesthood of the believer: It is what you and I are!
- a. .But the Priesthood of all Believers refers only to Christians. The Bible does not teach the priesthood of all human beings.
 - i. In discussing the priesthood of all believers, the believer has unhindered access to God. This access is secured by Christ's work on the cross. We have "*boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus* (Hebrews 10:19). The Holy Spirit enables our access, as we "*have access by one Spirit to the Father* (Ephesians 2:18).
5. Some Passages that bring light to this concept:

- a. 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9 *“As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* 9 *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”*.
 - i. Peter uses the same phrases and words as the passage I read from in Exodus. Why? Because we are the literal fulfillment of the promise that God had made that His people would be a priesthood and holy nation. We declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light! **Evangelism is the great priestly work of the Christian!** Making Christ’s love known to people is our priestly calling!
 - b. Rev 1:5-6 *“Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has **made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father** - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”*
 - c. Revelation 5:9-10 *“And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. **You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”**”*
 - d. Revelation 20:6 *“Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, **but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”**”*
 - e. So as priests...(any doubt now?) our inheritance is found in God, the pledge of which is the Holy Spirit, given to us, carried around inside of us...we are not only ministers of God but ministers to God, carrying around the Presence of God into the world we live in!
 - i. Old Testament priests were anointed with oil.
 1. In the New Testament, believers have an anointing from God:
 2. *“The anointing you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things”* (1st John 2:26-27).
 - f. It is not by coincidence that **we are encouraged not to get caught up in the worldly pursuits** and affairs that would capture our hearts and weigh us down. How easy it is to let the accumulation of a home, wealth, career, car, retirement...distract us from the real reason we are here and the real riches God gives and IS.
 - i. When the entire nation of Israel sinned, the nation-- including the Levites-- were taken off as part of the Babylonian Captivity in 586BC. Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 list those who returned from the Babylonian captivity, and only about 2.5% of those were Levites and temple servants. But, if the Levites were like any other tribe, they'd tend to represent one twelfth, or over 8% of the population. Thus, the Levites, in general, chose not to return in as great numbers from Babylon-- it is possible that they were allowed to own land, and with no tabernacle or temple to manage, they were sidetracked into other, more comfortable lives
 - ii. How about you?
 1. Possessions can be a huge stumbling block to our walk and our worship of God. They aren't evil, but if they aren't surrendered to God, whatever we hold onto has the nature of death in it. Everything we have (possessions, family, job, finances, plans) must be surrendered to God. It is only when they are given back to God in the continuous act of worship that we can truly enjoy God and BE the priests we were created to be.
6. What does it look like for someone who is sold out to God, who has nothing but God as His inheritance and who is holding onto nothing else but God Himself?
- a. Philippians 3:8-9 *“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them*

rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him...I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...."

- b. **Faced with this reality, we must ask ourselves, "which inheritance will I choose?"**
 - i. Will we be content with earthly riches, with prosperity, with the blessings of this creation?
 - ii. Or will our hearts only be satisfied with something more, something more than even the greatest riches of this life and world?
 - iii. Will we be satisfied with the blessings of God, the gifts of God, or the ministries of God?
 - iv. Or will our hearts long with a longing that only God can fill?
 - v. There are many blessings in this life but they all pale in comparison to the reality of God.

7. Boil this down to the reason WHY:

- a. God wants the world to be reconciled to Himself. He desires that every person be able to know Him and He has declared He will make Himself known through human vessels.
 - b. The gospel is proclaimed in power and not just words. This is why when someone is hurting, it is critical that you pray for them! That you minister to them. Every one of us! It isn't just the pastor's job. In fact, it is my job to show and teach you how to do it, not to do it FOR you. Because for me to do "ministry for you" erases the NT concept of the priesthood of the believer and puts all of the ministry back in the hands of a few (levitical priests).
8. What is holding you back? What have you allowed to consume your attention, focus and strength? If you are building a worldly inheritance, then you have come up short! Change what you are doing! Focus on building up the Kingdom of God with God as your inheritance!