

Love Life – Joshua 23:1-16
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
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I. INTRODUCTION

Well, today in our study of God's Word we're going to see laid out before us by Joshua something a lot like some contrasting pictures I'd like to show you as we begin. These pictures can be thought of as representing the patterns and the outcomes of two very different ways of living life as a child of God. The first pattern involves living pretty much just like the world around us, sharing their priorities and just going with the flow of what's important to people without God, with perhaps a weekly drop-in at church and maybe even a Bible study. In other words, a life primarily focused on loving and serving the world and what we could call its gods, or its God-substitutes.

For Americans these God substitutes could be things like status, having a good time, money, romantic love and sex, alcohol and drugs, getting the approval of others; or dare I say even things like sports, hunting, the outdoors, politics, family, and any number of other things that may not be bad in themselves, but become destructive when they become essentially what we're living for and what consumes most of our time and energy. This pattern of life might be pictured as life on a freeway in Los Angeles...SHOW L.A. FREEWAY PICTURE...rushing down a highway with the flow of humanity, white-knuckled and honking for people to get out of our way, and missing out on so much that God wants to show us and lead us into. And sooner or later, especially if we're meddling in worldly things we know are wrong and sinful or if we're allowing worldly ideas or practices to creep in, we're going to end up in this situation: SHOW FREEWAY CRASH PICTURE.

Well, the second pattern of living life as God's child looks very different from the way others in the world are living their lives. In fact, we're likely to be conspicuous to those who don't know Christ. If we're truly living life this way we'll stand out and even be subject to ridicule for the choices we're making and the things that are important to us. I'd like to call this pattern, true "love life." This is a life flowing from being loved by God through Christ and that's focused on loving him back by his work and power in our hearts. It's a life that won't flirt or

mess around with questionable activities. Effectively lived it will involve saying no to things that are important to those who don't know Christ. It will involve holding loosely to any riches of the world we possess. It will involve sacrificing ourselves and our preferences for the good of others and to stay set apart for God's purposes.

And while it may seem on the surface like this second pattern of life involves loss and missing out on some fun and exciting things, in reality it's the most rewarding and fulfilling and blessing-filled path we could ever take. And that's because we'll be replacing the world's lust, lies and traps with God's love, truth and freedom. It's loving what leads to true life instead of loving the things that lead to death. If the first pattern of life was pictured as a freeway in L.A., the second pattern, which is God's intention for us as his children, could be pictured like this: SHOW PICTURE OF BEAUTIFUL TWO-LANE HIGHWAY THROUGH A SCENIC AREA.

And consider the outcome of the first pattern of life. If you were a tree it would look like this: SHOW DEAD TREE PICTURE. In contrast the outcome of God's true love life would look like this: SHOW FLOWERING TREE PICTURE. These are the two contrasting alternatives Joshua lays out for the people of Israel in our passage today: Joshua chapter 23. Turn there in your Bibles, if you would, and let's begin with the first 5 verses, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *The Lord Who Fights For You.*

II. THE LORD WHO FIGHTS FOR YOU (Vs. 1 to 5)

Beginning in verse 1:

1 A long time afterward, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, 2 Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, "I am now old and well advanced in years. 3 And you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the Lord your God who has fought for you. 4 Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. 5 The Lord your God will push them

back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the Lord your God promised you.

Well, in the opening verse of Joshua 23 we first notice some statements about when this speech from Joshua took place. We're told it was: ***A long time afterward, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years.*** Evidently many years after the controversy over the altar of witness (probably at least 10 or 20), when Joshua was old and likely about to die, and Israel had been experiencing rest from war as a blessing from the Lord; Joshua called together the leaders of all the tribes to share with them an important message...his last words you might say before dying at the ripe old age of 110. The picture we get here is Joshua carefully choosing what he believes is most important to share with the leaders of Israel before he dies. In other words, this is a very important message given by a very godly leader as he faces the end of his life and considers what his last words will be.

Now as Joshua begins his speech, you can tell that he's facing reality as he starts by saying: *I'm old...VERY old!* I've been around a good long while and my time is about up. But then he moves in a very interesting direction. He doesn't proceed to review his accomplishments and successes and highlight the great legacy he leaves behind, but instead he begins to speak about *what the Lord has done*. If we've lived our lives as God intends, this is what we'll all speak about at the end. God will be the hero of our lives! We'll know that any good that was accomplished was done by his work and power.

In Joshua's end-of-life speech, he begins by reminding the leaders that they had seen with their own eyes all that the Lord had done. They didn't need to just trust his word on the matter, they had seen and experienced and witnessed it all firsthand. They had seen the Lord in action...fighting with great power. As Moses and all Israel had sung after the miraculous Red Sea crossing: ***The LORD is a man of war*** (Exodus 15:3a), and wonder of wonders he had been fighting for them.

What a profound blessing and gift and privilege it is to have the God of the universe fighting for you! Notice in verse 3 those two short phrases that reveal the Lord's personal warfare on behalf of his people. What the Lord had done to utterly defeat and disarm the nations in the land had been done for your sake and

it is the Lord who has fought *for you*. Can you think of any greater gift and advantage in a battle than having God himself in your army? And that he would care enough to engage in our battles on our behalf and for our benefit?

And it wasn't because Israel was somehow better than other nations or deserving in any way of his favor, but simply because the Lord had chosen to set his love on them and reveal his glory and grace to the world through them. Joshua reminded the leaders here of what great gifts they had received and experienced from God firsthand. And he made it clear that the great victories they had won and the great rest they'd been experiencing for many years now, were not a result of their great power and skill, but because the Lord had done it for them.

Now as Joshua moves on in verse 4, you might say that he calls out "the elephant in the room." Even though there had been peace in the land for many years and rest from war, there were still many nations that needed to be removed completely from the land. The job wasn't done. Joshua under the Lord's direction had already allotted the full extent of the land to the various tribes of Israel...it was theirs...it had been side aside for them by the Lord. But now the LORD was testing them to see if they would continue to trust him and courageously complete the job by his power, rather than just settling for what they already had and allowing other nations to continuing occupying various parts of their inheritance.

Then in verse 5 Joshua reminds them of God's promise to them if they would continue following him courageously into battle: ***The Lord your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the Lord your God promised you.*** They'd already seen God do this powerfully and completely in the battles they'd already fought. They didn't have to take anyone else's word for it. All they needed to do was continue to trust him and follow him into battle. The Lord would push back their enemies. The Lord would drive them out. Their possession of the full extent of inherited land would be a certainty, just as all God's promises are. But if they wanted to take possession of all that God intended for them, they would need to temporarily set aside the rest and comfort they'd been experiencing for many years now and engage in the battle for God's purposes according to his plan.

III. THE LOVE HE CALLS YOU TO (Vs. 6 to 13)

Joshua had now reminded them of *the Lord who fights for you*, now it was time for a refresher on *the love he calls you to*. Let's read verses 6 through 13:

6 Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, 7 that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, 8 but you shall cling to the Lord your God just as you have done to this day. 9 For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. 10 One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he promised you. 11 Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God. 12 For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, 13 know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the Lord your God has given you.

You may have noticed that we have two “therefores” in these 8 verses. The first one is in verse 6. Having reminded the leaders how they'd already seen the Lord fighting for them and calling them to trust that he would continue to do so, Joshua then tells them how they should respond to this reality...how they should respond to the fact that the God of the universe was their God and was personally committed to them in love and ready to continue fighting powerfully on their behalf. Did you notice in verses 1 through 5 that 4 times the Lord is referred to as “your God.” In other words, this is personal. The one true God is personally committed to you and you have the great privilege of being connected to him and walking in his power. ***Therefore***, Joshua says, ***be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left***. God has clearly revealed to you in his written Word how you can remain connected to him and walk in the fullness of his power, so pay attention to it, know it, and put into practice. It's your life manual and as

long as you're seeking to follow it and reject the godless ways of the world, you'll be strong in the mighty power of God.

Now In verse 11, where we see the second "therefore," Joshua restates this command as *loving the Lord your God*. In other words, this is how you will love God who loves you, by believing what he says and learning to live life like him. Be very strong, steadfast, and careful to know his Word and do it. It's important that we don't view this as a call to perfect keeping of a list of rules or a requirement to never sin or make a mistake. Notice in verse 8 that Joshua ties in this keeping and doing of God's written Word with *clinging to the Lord*; holding tightly to him and not wandering off to the left or the right or fiddling around with worldly ways of living life. Hold tight to him. Cleave to the Lord, some translations say. The *Westminster Bible Commentary* says this is the Old Testament way of saying, "Abide in Christ" (cf. John 15:1-10). *Matthew Henry* describes it this way: "delight in him, depend upon him, devote yourself to his glory, and continue to do so to the end."

This is full pursuit of God for our hope and joy in life. It's reaching out to him continually for his strength, power and wisdom. It's a focus on his glory in all we do and a desire to accomplish his purposes. It's a willingness to deal with our sin when it does arise through repentance and confession. And we only walk into this true love life when we cling to him and he reworks our affections and priorities and desires. And notice that Joshua states that the people of Israel have actually been doing this clinging to the Lord well up to the day of this speech he's giving. Does this mean they've been sinless and completely holy and godly and that no person has even broke one of the guidelines in God's Word? Certainly not. But it does mean they've been diligently seeking to follow his Word by his power, they've been resolving sin as it arises, and their desire has been to walk with their God and stay in step with his purposes. They've been loving the Lord their God and clinging to him, being diligent not to adopt the practices and life philosophy of the nations around them.

Now in verses 7 and 12, Joshua gives the leaders of Israel clear statements of what God does NOT want them to do, and what loving the Lord their God, clinging to him and putting his Word into practice will keep them from falling into. What he tells them is that if they aren't careful to love the Lord and walk in his ways, they'll start heading down the road of compromise...a slippery slope to a freefall

into a deep canyon. God and Joshua knew that for the Israelites the big temptation was going to be the foreign nations who served other gods, and whom they so far had not removed fully from the land. If the Israelites forgot the Lord's deep love for them and his personal commitment to them...if they stopped clinging to him and delighting in him...they would begin abandoning his Word and start delighting instead in the false gods of the foreign nations and living life just like the rest of the world.

It would begin with seemingly innocent love for another person leading to uniting themselves in marriage to people who worshipped false gods. Soon the false gods would be part of the conversation in the house. Next they would begin making promises on the names of the false gods. Pretty soon they would actually begin to serve the false gods, offering up their time, energy and resources to pursue them. And finally, they would be bowing down in full, surrendered worship of these false gods. And what would be the consequences for those who adopted the ways of the world and surrendered to worship of false gods? The Lord would no longer fight for them, and what they thought would satisfy them and fulfill them outside of God would end up destroying them and removing them from the land of their inheritance, becoming a snare and a trap, a whip on their sides, and thorns in their eyes.

That sounds pretty painful, doesn't it? Most animal traps and snares seem to involve something that snaps down on a foot, a nose, a head, or some other part of the body. And even if it's a cage-type trap, freedom is lost and death is pretty much a certainty by some other means. Doesn't a whip on your sides sound awful and make you want to cringe just thinking about it? And have you ever gotten something stuck in your eye? Usually that's all you can think about until it's out and sleeping isn't even possible until it's gone. But imagine a thorn being what's stuck in your eye! Ouch! These are pretty graphic descriptions of the pain we experience when we fall for the trap of living our lives for the false gods of the world. What we thought would satisfy us ends up destroying us and causing great pain in the process!

And not only that, we also miss out on that great and awesome gift of experiencing the Lord fighting our battles. **...no man has been able to stand before you to this day. One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.** What's the only way

we can avoid falling into the trap of living life just like the world around us? *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* Cling to him. Find your delight in him. Believe what he's promised you: that he is with you and ready to fight for you right now as you walk in his ways with trust in him. It's only in experiencing and knowing his personal love for us and his good intentions toward us and delighting in him alone, that we will be able to resist spending our lives pursuing the false gods, the false hopes of the world. *Love God:* find rest and life. *Love the world:* find pain and death. It's that simple.

IV. THE WORD YOU KNOW IS TRUE (Vs. 14 to 16)

Well, let's read our final 3 verses for today, verses 14 through 16. After showing them *the Lord who fights for you* and *the love he calls you to*, Joshua closes by reminding them of *the Word you know is true*. He says:

14 "And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed. 15 But just as all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the Lord your God has given you, 16 if you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you."

This is Joshua's closing statement to the leaders of Israel who will be carrying on after he's gone, and it has two parts. First, Joshua tells them what they all, without a doubt, know to be true from what they've already experienced in conquering the Promised Land: ***not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you.*** All God's promises to you of good things and blessings as you walk with him and follow him have come true. He's been true to his Word and not one thing he promised has failed to come true.

But the second thing they need to know is that just as God's promised blessings have all come true as they've followed him, so will all of his promised cursings come true should they abandon him, walk away from his Word, and pursue the false gods of the world. They've seen that God always keeps his promises, now they also need to know that he will always bring his promised consequences should they reject his true love and love what is false instead. His anger will be kindled against them and he will remove them quickly from the land he'd given them. In other words, there will be real, effective and painful consequences that will certainly come from mixing with the world and pursuing its gods.

By the way, this is not a statement about the Israelites or us losing our salvation. Instead, it's a statement about the pain and loss and heartache we'll inevitably suffer if we spend our lives pursuing empty things that can never satisfy and that offer only an illusion of hope and fulfillment. These things always lead to disappointment, pain, slavery and death. That's why God wants us to stay away from them. If we set our love on the gods of this world, we can expect to be harmed and destroyed by them.

These verses also tell us that the holiness of God's people and their love for him is of intense importance to God, and we miss out on the fullness of his presence and power and forfeit his blessings when we love and serve the world instead of him. God will spare no effort to get our attention and our affections directed back to himself, our only hope and the only One who knows us inside and out and loves us with a love that will not let us go.

V. CONCLUSION

What does your love life look like today? What or who are you truly loving when you examine the way you spend your time, energy and money, and when you think about what you're passionate about and what gets you excited? Is what you love leading you to lasting joy and fulfillment, or is it little by little eating you away inside as it siphons away all your energy and disappoints you over and over again? One thing is so clear in this passage we've studied today, and that's how engaged and committed and effective and ready God is to fight for his people and work for lasting good in our lives...how ready he is to bless us and fill us up and give us what we need to face life in this broken world...and how much he wants to

protect us from wasting our lives on empty illusions that take away our freedom and cause great pain, suffering and disappointment.

Are you ready to start abandoning the illusions...SHOW L.A FREEWAY PICTURE...to get off the L.A. freeway with the rest of humanity headed for a crash...SHOW COUNTRY HIGHWAY PICTURE...and get on the country highway of full pursuit of the Life-Giver. He invites us to *love him for life*. This is the love life we've been longing for and I pray that God has awakened our hearts today to long for more of him with all we have. Lord, please start chipping away at those things in our lives that we love more than you and that keep us from living the life you've intended for us. Only you can reveal what those things are in each of our lives. Please do so and release our death grip on them.

My friends, from this passage we've seen that God has good intentions toward us and loves to give us good gifts. We've seen that he fights with power for his people and that victory over our enemies always comes from him. And we've been reminded that not one word of God's promises to us will ever fail. May these truths motivate us to love him back with all that we have as we fill our minds with his Word, cling to him, and by his power live life his way with his priorities.

SERMON APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE – 5/13/2018
Love Life – Joshua 23:1-16

Read Joshua 23:1-16, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read. Look at the surrounding verses, take your time and talk to God as you read and meditate on it. Think through the following, writing notes and thoughts and looking up related Scriptures as needed:

Write down from the passage or from what was shared in the sermon: 1) a truth that stands out to you; 2) anything you believe God is showing you or telling you personally through it; 3) any related Scripture that comes to mind; 4) any questions you have.

What are some ways you've seen the Lord actively fighting for you during your life?

Can you think of anything in your life right now that God is calling you to do that will require him to fight on your behalf to make it possible? Describe.

According to verses 6 through 13, what does *loving the Lord your God* look like, both positively and negatively?

What are some false gods (money, success, sports, pleasure, etc.) you've served in the past and what effects did they have on your life? How were you able to move beyond them?

Spend some time evaluating the way you currently spend your time and what's important to you and asking God to show you anything in your life that may be approaching the level of a false god. List anything he shows in the space below:

Summarize below anything God is calling you personally to believe, any actions God is asking you to take, or any attitudes He wants to change. Repent where needed and enjoy God's mercy. Then pray over these items and make a plan for change by the power of the Spirit.