

Scripture Readings and Sermon

November 8, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Joshua 1:1-6; 23:1-8; 24:14-31 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The book of Joshua is mainly overlooked by the lectionary except for the crossing of the Jordan (3:7-17), the covenant at Gilgal (5:9-12), and the covenant at Shechem (24:1-3a, 14-25). The primary reason for this oversight is that the book primarily deals with the conquest of the land of Canaan (2-12) and the distribution of the land between the twelve tribes (13-22). The events recorded reflected a long campaign into the center of the land, then the southern city states, and finally the northern city states. Unlike modern military stories of conquest, Joshua was a reluctant conqueror who was often prodded by angels and forced to respond to attacks from others. This reluctance is foreshadowed by the LORD telling Joshua three times at the beginning of the book to "be strong and courageous". At the end of the book, it is Joshua who tells the people to be strong and courageous in the LORD. Joshua gives his farewell address to the people of Israel before the different tribes go to their own regions to claim the land. As one of the last survivors of the wilderness journey, Joshua calls the people to remember where they came from and that God made this new land possible. Gathering the people at Shechem was to remind them of the LORD's promise to Abram (Genesis 12:6-7) and Jacob's rejection of "all the foreign gods" of his wives (Genesis 35:4). Using the location to remind the people of these two patriarchs and the events that occurred strengthens Joshua's call to "choose this day whom you will serve".

Joshua 1:6 "Be strong and courageous"

Joshua 24:15 "we will serve the LORD."

Why is it important to hear both of these statements which occur at the beginning and end of Joshua's journey?

Can we serve the LORD by our own will or power?

Does God give us grace just for our own needs and wants?

When do you need to be strong and courageous in the service of the LORD?

Commentary on Matthew 25:1-13 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The parable of the ten virgins comes in the middle of a long discussion by Jesus about the end of days. The discussion begins with Jesus saying "the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see 'the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven' with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matthew 24:30-31 compare to 1 Thessalonians 4:16) The discussion ends with the story of the talents and the judgment of the sheep and the goats. It is within this context that the parable should be interpreted. Like the person who buried the one talent, the five "foolish virgins" did not invest in oil but thought they would have time. If the listener was confused about the meaning of running out of oil or burying the talent, Jesus spells it out in the parable of the sheep and the goats. Harkening back to the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21), doing the will of God is the oil in our lamps, the investment of talents, and the acts of love to "the least of these". It is not enough for Matthew that a person chooses Jesus (Joshua 24:15) but they must live out that choice daily.

Matthew 25:12 "Truly I tell you, I do not know you."

Do these words seem harsh and unforgiving coming from Jesus?

Why does Jesus not know them?

What does God's will, oil, and the love we show the least have in common?
Could it be that since God "remembers our sins no more" that Jesus only knows us
by the love we have shown? (They will know you by your love)

Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The Thessalonians were concerned because some of those who had become followers of Christ had died and Jesus had not yet returned. The community was beginning to realize that the promised return may not happen in their lifetime. So what happens to those who died before the return? Paul's response gives both hope and assurance that all those who died believing in Christ will be raised first. By using the image of God's trumpet (1 Thessalonians 4:16), Paul is making reference to the feast of Rosh Hashanah (Leviticus 23:24) which calls the people in from the harvest to the time of judgment at Yom Kippur (Leviticus 23:27) ten days later. In the time of Jesus, these festivals reminded the people that they would be held accountable for how they lived and what they did with the land. Paul assures those in Christ that this is not a time of dread but of hope for Jesus is our judge.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 "Therefore encourage one another with these words."

Are you encouraged by the assurance of Jesus' second coming?

Do you look towards judgment as a time when people "get what's coming to them"?

Are you truly ready to "get what's coming" to you?

If your hope is in grace, then shouldn't we share that grace with others?

Are we ready to be judged based on how well we loved all God's children?

Sermon "Be Strong and Courageous" (*Sermon [Video](#)*)

At the end of his life, Joshua remembered the words the LORD had spoken to him after Moses' death. It was now time for him to tell all of Israel to "be strong and courageous". The battles to take the promised land was over but the war to keep the land was just beginning. To win the war, the people needed to put away false gods and remember that it was the LORD who won all of those battles. This call to "be strong and courageous" in the faith continues to ring true today.

We are surrounded by false gods and battles that lead us away from the call of Christ. It is far too easy in this world of individualism to forget who we serve and that we have been bought with a price. On the cross, Jesus not only washed away our sins but paid the bride price. We are the brides of Christ. Bound by the covenant of forgiveness and united through the power of the Holy Spirit. The story of the ten bridesmaids is our story. We are the ones who should be waiting for the groom's return with oil in our lamps.

To shine the light of Christ in a world bent on self destruction, Christians are called to keep their lamps filled with the oil of Christ's love. It is by his love that his disciples are to be known. Not our theological positions, dogmatic politics, or ethical judgments but by the love we show to the least of these. When we are distracted by the 'crisis' of the world and get drawn into the divisiveness of our sinful world, we chase after false gods and run out of oil. It is only by keeping our eyes on Christ in prayer and scripture that we can receive our daily bread of love. In our current world, this takes a strong and courageous faith. A faith that walks away when people spew hatred. A faith that claims a love of God for everyone, even those who disagree with us.

Why should we make such an effort when it is easier to choose one side or another? Why should we love those who we might feel are anti-Christian? Because our Lord demands it! If we run out of the oil of love even for our enemies then the doors will be shut. Christ is coming to claim his own. We

will be judged not on how well we defended his church or his word but on how well we lived out that word in our lives. Have you lived in such a way that even your enemies admire your compassion and grace? Do you treat others the way Jesus treated those he encountered - even those who crucified him? Will the door be open with the trumpet is called or will you be too busy arguing that you can not hear the sound of love calling you home? It is time to be "strong and courageous" in our love for our LORD and our neighbor.