

# How Joshua Teaches Us to Find True and Everlasting Life

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by David Schrock

*Moses was dead to begin with.  
-- Joshua 1:1 --*

*Marley was dead to begin with.  
-- Charles Dickens --*

When Charles Dickens wrote the opening line to *A Christmas Carol*, he touched off one of the most wonderful Christmas stories ever told. Marley, the miserly associate of Ebenezer Scrooge, was dead and now all eyes turned to his living partner. Though the story begins in the darkness of Scrooge's heart, by the end the light of Christmas opens the heart of this old sinner.

Something similar occurs when we read the opening line of Joshua. The titanic figure of Moses, the servant of Yahweh---the prophet, priest, and leader of Israel; the one who led Israel out of Egypt, received the Law, and stood before the wrath of God to seek Israel's pardon---this incredible Moses was gone. Now, all eyes were set on Joshua, Moses's Spirit-filled associate. Would he be able to lead the people into the light of the Promised Land?

Strikingly, both *A Christmas Carol* and Joshua are comedies. Meaning, that both find resolution and good cheer by the end of the book. In Dickens' case, Scrooge is "converted" through the three Christmas spirits. In Joshua's, case the Spirit of God is promised to Moses's successor, such Joshua's glory, by the end of his life, is arguably greater than that of Moses. The former brought Israel out of the land, but died in the Wilderness because of his sin. But Joshua, who contributed to Israel's flight from Egypt, added to his credentials the successful deliverance of Israel into the land.

## Getting Into the Book That Gets Israel Into the Land

This week we begin a new sermon series on the book of Joshua. And in this book we will see a great number of glorious truths.

- *God's Word* will prove true and never failing. All that God promised Moses about the land will be fulfilled by the end of Joshua.
- *God's mercy* will be displayed in the salvation of Rahab. By saving this prostitute from Jericho, we see how God loves to redeem sinners and bring them into his family. Incredibly, Matthew 1:5 tells us Rahab is the great, great, . . . grandmother of Jesus.

- *God's justice* will flash with fire, as Israel is used by God to execute judgment on the sins of the people of Canaan. This act of just retribution is often confused as senseless violence, but by connecting these actions to Genesis 10 and Genesis 15, we will see the incredible patience of God, as well as his holiness.
- And *God's wisdom* will also be seen in the way Yahweh defeats the nations and brings Israel into the land.

On an on we could go. But the most important thing to see in all of Joshua is the man at the center of the book. Named by Moses to be the Savior of Israel (Num. 13:16)---Joshua means "Yahweh is salvation." This is also the name Gabriel gave Jesus (=Joshua), indicating that this man will foreshadow many of the characteristics and actions of Jesus Christ. In fact, it is not too much to say that a study of Joshua is a study of Jesus in type and shadow.

Truly, this is why the book can be called a comedy. Whereas Exodus ends with Moses unable to enter the tabernacle, and Numbers ends with the first generation dead in the Wilderness, and Deuteronomy ends with Moses dead and unable to go into the land, Joshua records how God strengthens this Spirit-filled man, in order to bring Israel into the land. Joshua 21:43-45 puts it like this,

*Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. <sup>44</sup> And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. <sup>45</sup> Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.*

Indeed, the book begins with tragedy, the death of Moses, but ends with victory---the people of God are in the land. In this way, we can see how Joshua's life points to a greater Savior in the future, one who is also greater than Moses. Still, we must also admit that the end of Joshua also forebodes bad news.

## **The Death of Joshua and the Resurrection of Another Joshua**

Just as Deuteronomy closes with Moses's death, so Joshua closes with Joshua's death. In fact, it also recounts the death of Joseph (whose bones are now in the land) and Eleazar the priest. In this way, Joshua ends with three funerals. Like someone returning to the grave of Tiny Tim in the closing credits of *A Christmas Carol*, Joshua closes with a somber note. For all the ways God brought salvation through "Yahweh is Salvation" (i.e., Joshua), there remains a need for a greater Savior.

As Hebrews 3-4 puts it, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, because Joshua, son of Nun, died and failed to lead the people eternally. Indeed, this is the refrain of the Old Testament. In every victory, success, covenant renewal, and royal coronation, there remained the specter of death and the loss of righteous leaders.

That being said, because the first Joshua pointed forward to another Joshua and because that Joshua, Jesus Christ, died *and* rose again, we can know that the story of life which is filled with death, will not end in death for those who have trusted in Christ.

# What Joshua Has to Say to Those Suffering the Loss of a Loved One

It is not lost on me that this week our church family has suffered the sudden and unexpected loss of a precious sister in Christ, a devoted wife and mother, and a dear friend and servant. I write this as I prepare to attend Elizabeth Krafsig's funeral and I mourn her loss, even as I celebrate her going to be with Christ. Here on earth, I mourn with her family and friends, and I grieve the way death rips apart loved ones, devastates families, and shatters dreams.

The world tells us that life is found in all the things that we do before we die. It writes the story this way: Moses lived a long, meaningful life and then he died. Or Marley lived a short, miserable life and then he died. But praise be to God, that is not how the Bible writes the story.

In Adam, we are born in sin, separated from God, and destined to die. For the Christian, death comes at the beginning, not the end. Indeed, like Joshua, our story starts with a funeral and ends with an entrance to glory. Yes, death is real and so are the funerals of believers, but as 1 Thessalonians 4:13 puts it, we grieve with hope! We grieve knowing that death for the Christian is the beginning of pure, untainted life.

This hope comes from knowing that the Christian's story is written backwards. Death comes at the start; life comes at the end. That is how comedies are written and how God has inspired the book of Joshua and the whole Bible.

Make no mistake, the Spirit inspired the book of Joshua to teach us a key lesson. Life is not found in the Law of Moses, it is found in the fulfillment of the Law that comes in Joshua = Jesus. Joshua, son of Nun, foreshadows that good news in the history of Israel. And Jesus, Son of Mary, Son of God, embodies the gospel in his own death and resurrection.

Indeed, the gospel tells us that life begins in the death of Christ for sinners. And if our life begins in his death, then we have absolute assurance that when we die, or when one of our loved ones dies in Christ, they have gone from death to life everlasting. Indeed, the book of Joshua teaches us how to look at life and to see that all the tears of this age will be swallowed up in an ocean of life.

Like sojourners in the wilderness and pilgrims entering a new land, Joshua teaches us that transitioning into our heavenly home is not easy or without cost. But in the end, because Jesus Christ is with us---and *will not leave us nor forsake us*---we have every assurance that he will lead us safely home.

For those who have gone before us in death, we miss them terribly. But we know where they are and we know that because their Redeemer lives, they too live in glory. Because of that gospel truth, we have hope---hope that strengthens our faith, impels our love, and sustains our endurance.

## Prayers for the Weekend

This weekend as our church family begins with a funeral for Elizabeth Krafsig, take time to pray for her family---for Rich, Emmy, Abby, Zack, and Stephanie, for her mom and for her

siblings Dinah, Vicki, and Jim. Pray for the Spirit to comfort and sustain them and for the family of faith to rally around them.

At the same time, pray for the Word of God that will be preached this weekend. May God use it to bolster our faith as we face a world scarred by death. For indeed, we cannot escape the funerals of life, nor can we plan for their delay or arrival. But praise be to God, Jesus Christ has defeated the grave, and soon his final enemy---death---will be defeated too.

Until then, let God's Word remind you that the gospel story which begins with a funeral ends with life in the promised land. And all who are in Christ, will not---indeed, cannot---miss that life nor the resurrection that Christ promises. To that end let us encourage one another and may that hope strengthen our hearts.

Sorrowful, yet rejoicing,

Pastor David