

HAVE YOU LEFT ANYTHING UNDONE?**JOSHUA 24:14-31**

How many of you have ever observed the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery? If you haven't seen it, you should make a special effort to do so the next time you're in Washington, DC. Although a man by the name of Harry Heintz had gotten to witness this very special ceremony several times, one day he got to witness something new at Arlington. When the changing of the guard was completed, the commanding officer asked everyone there to remain standing in silence. One of the guards, a Sergeant Jennings, had completed 27 months of this special duty and wanted now to pay his own personal respects to the unknown soldiers. The commanding officer handed Jennings four roses. He approached the great Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers from World War 1, knelt, and placed a rose before it. Then he moved with solemn dignity and precision to the tombs honoring unknown soldiers from World War 2, the war in Korea, and the war in Vietnam, kneeling to place one red rose upon each tomb. He returned to his commanding officer and stood before him. At attention, with their eyes locked, they shook hands. Then Sergeant Jennings carefully removed his white gloves and returned them, his work finished. He saluted his officer and left. It was a vivid picture of how to finish a task well. Harry Heintz is a follower of Jesus. At that moment, he thought of standing before the Lord Jesus someday, taking off his gloves and handing them to Him. There will be day when the task of this life is over. Will you finish well?

This morning we bring our summer study of the Old Testament book of Joshua to a conclusion. I thought it would be helpful to take one last look at Joshua, the man. Here's a wonderful summary of his life. It says, "As the LORD commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and Joshua did it; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses." (Josh 11:15 NIV) Isn't that a powerful statement – "he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded"? In other words, he finished well. Everything God wanted Joshua to accomplish, he accomplished. Joshua was a great man and a godly man not because he was wealthy (he wasn't) or because he had an easy life (he didn't), or because he had tremendous natural talents and abilities (the Bible doesn't point out any), but precisely because he left nothing undone of all the Lord commanded him to do. That's what mattered to God. I hope that when I stand before the Lord some day in Heaven I'll hear Him say, "Rick left nothing undone of all that I commanded him to do. He finished well." How about you? Do you want to finish well?

Joshua got everything he was given by God. He fully became the man God wanted him to be. So, then, using Joshua as an example or illustration, what can we learn from his life that will help us get what we've been given and become who God wants us to be? I'd like to point out three key habits I see in Joshua's life – three godly practices he just kept doing over and over again throughout his life. I believe they were key to Joshua getting everything God had given him personally and becoming who God wanted him to be. Guess what? I believe they're equally important in you getting everything God has given you personally and becoming who God wants you to be. First of all, Joshua made a habit of trusting God. Likewise, you and I need to ...

MAKE A HABIT OF TRUSTING GOD.

So who was Joshua, again? He'd been a slave in Egypt. He'd been a witness to incredible miracles like the devastating plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea. Joshua became Moses' right hand man. After Moses' death, Joshua became Israel's new leader. He led Israel in defeating 31 Canaanite kings and their armies. He died at the age of 110, dearly loved and deeply respected by all Israel. Even before Joshua assumed the mantle of leadership, it was evident that he made a habit of trusting God. The character quality that emerged in Joshua was courage – that may well be the best way to discern when a person is really trusting God. Joshua became courageous. It was the result of a habit of trusting God. Perhaps the best early example of Joshua's courage was when Moses sent him and eleven other spies into the Promised Land of Canaan. Their mission was to see what kind of obstacles the people of Israel would encounter as well as what kind of abundance awaited them. Only Joshua and one other spy, Caleb, brought back a positive report. They, along with Moses, pleaded with the people of Israel to get what God had given to them. Sure, Joshua saw the obstacles just as well as anyone else, but he just believed God was bigger than the obstacles. When you make a habit of trusting God, you aren't blind to life's obstacles and enemies. You just believe God is bigger than any obstacle or enemy in your life. You keep on trusting Him even when you feel afraid and weak.

Was Joshua just naturally courageous? I don't think so. When he first became the leader of God's people, God told him to be strong and courageous over and over again. "... As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous... Be strong and very courageous.... Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (Josh 1:6, 7, 9 NIV) The people of Israel told him to be strong and courageous, too! "Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses.... Only be strong and courageous!" (Josh 1:17-18 NIV) Why? I think Joshua struggled with feelings of weakness and fear like any of us. He knew it wasn't going to be easy. He knew Israel faced formidable obstacles and great enemies as they advanced into Canaan. He felt inadequate when he compared himself with Moses. But Joshua pushed through it. He made a habit of trusting God. As a result, he acted courageously. And that courageous trust led to success time and time again. It was a big reason that Joshua left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded him to do.

Sometimes the greatest examples of faith and courage today come from outside of our own country in places where it's not comfortable or easy to follow Jesus. *The New York Times* recently profiled a 32-year-old man in Afghanistan named Josef. He briefly escaped civil war in his home country by fleeing to Germany, where many of his siblings live. At that point, he had already rejected the Muslim faith of his family. Out of curiosity, he got to know some Christian missionaries and attended church services held in his native language. He told the reporter: "When I threw away my Islamic beliefs, I was living in a space of spiritual emptiness. During that time I was studying different religions—Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. I was studying Islam as well ... I think

I was impressed by the personality of Jesus himself. The fact that he came here to take all of our sins; that moved me. I admired his character and personality long before I was baptized." After being released from a refugee camp, he became a follower of Christ, and was soon deported. Today, back in Afghanistan, he's hiding from family members who have vowed to kill him for renouncing Islam. A brother-in-law named Ibrahim even offered *The New York Times* reporter \$20,000 to tell him where Josef is hiding. "If I find him, once we are done with him, I will kill his [three-year-old] son as well, because his son is a bastard," Ibrahim said. Josef's wife and child are also in hiding in Pakistan, but as for Josef, his faith remains unshaken. He says, "My body is in prison, but my soul is free." How's that for faith? How's that for courage?

Trusting God will produce courageous living in your life just like it did in Joshua's life and is doing in Josef's life. When you make a habit of trusting God, it doesn't mean the absence of fear, or weakness, or inadequacy. It just means you push through it. Sure, you have obstacle and enemies, too, but you make a habit of trusting God. That enables you to act courageously and to believe God is bigger than every enemy and obstacle that comes against you. I didn't say life will always be easy or happy. It won't be! It wasn't for Joshua! But, you'll get what you've been given. You'll leave nothing undone of what the Lord wants you to accomplish. You'll finish well. Secondly, Joshua made a habit of choosing God. Likewise, you and I need to:

MAKE A HABIT OF CHOOSING GOD.

Let's read our text for today. Joshua calls the people of Israel before him at a place called Shechem. Why Shechem? At that very place, some 400-500 years earlier, God had first promised Abraham – the Israelites' great ancestor – that He would give his descendants this very land. At this same place, Jacob – Abraham's grandson – had forsaken idolatry in order to follow the one, true God. Shechem was both a place of promise and a place of choice. For Joshua it was also a place of challenge – a place to remind God's people of God's promise and urge them to make a habit of choosing God over and over again.

What does Joshua remind the people of? He wanted them to know that God had chosen them out of His grace not because they were so special and deserved His attention. Then, he goes on as if to say, "Now, look here, folks. If you think serving the Lord is just too restrictive or too narrow or too limiting, go ahead and choose some other god or gods and worship them instead. Your pagan neighbors have many other gods to choose from! But the Lord has already proved to you that He's the one and only true God. Let me tell you where I stand! Let me tell you where my family stands! We're gonna serve the Lord!" Joshua had made a choice early in his life to follow the Lord with all of his heart come what may. And he kept on choosing the Lord over and over again throughout all of his life experiences right up to the final day. He made a habit of choosing God – not just once but continually; not just one but every day.

Let me digress just a moment here to point out something important. Joshua was one father, one parent, one head of a household who wasn't afraid to be the spiritual leader

in his own home. Joshua was bold enough to speak for everyone in his family, "... But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD." (Josh 24:15 NLT) I still encounter Christian parents who out of some misguided fear that they're going to come on too strong; instead, fail to provide strong spiritual leadership to their own kids. They're reluctant to insist their kids come to worship regularly, or participate in a youth group or a Sunday School class, or a Wednesday club program. Oddly enough, you never find the same parents saying, "Well, I don't want to force education on my kids, so I'll let them decide if and when they go to school." They're reluctant to pray together, or read the Bible, or talk about the importance of following Jesus with them. Others are so afraid of alienating their kids, they refuse to challenge ungodly attitudes and actions that they observe in their children. Some are even foolish enough to suggest that they want their kids to make up their own minds about spiritual matters. There is everything right, good and godly about communicating a very clear, unequivocal, no compromise message to everyone in your home: "As long as you live under this roof, you will live in an environment where Jesus is Lord. When you're on your own, you'll be free to relate or not relate to God as you will. But as for this family, we're going to serve the Lord."

God calls every person to make a definite, conscious, and continual decision for or against Him. That's what you call a habit. "...Choose today whom you will serve..." (Josh 24:15 NLT) God doesn't offer you the luxury of neutrality. You don't choose God just once in your life and then forget about it. Now, I'm not saying you should get saved or born again over and over again. I am saying, however, that life is so dynamic, so demanding and so challenging that you must revisit that commitment every day of your life. Who am I going to worship today? Who am I going to serve today? Who am I going to live for today? There is a need to choose God every day – to make it a habit. You make a deliberate and conscious choice to live life every day in full recognition of who God is. He is holy, incomprehensible, pure, majestic and magnificent and He will not share His rightful place in your life with something or someone else.

Why this challenge to choose God over and over again? Because Joshua knew that many of the Israelites were strongly tempted to worship idols – the false gods of their pagan neighbors. Now an idol is anything or anyone that occupies the place God alone should have in your life. Idolatry is alive and well in 2014. No, fewer people today worship objects made out of wood, stone or metal – at least in our country – but they certainly keep on putting other things in the place that should be reserved for God alone. For example, people make an idol out of money or the things money can buy. People worship at the temples of accomplishment, security, or a career. Sometimes people can put other human beings in the place only God should have. We human beings have an ingenious ability to make an idol out of almost anything. You can be sure that we live in a culture with just as many gods as surrounded the Israelites.

Do you really worship God alone? One of the great, persistent and powerful temptations you will face in your life is putting other things in that place that should be reserved for God alone. Be very careful about declaring that your life is an "idol-free zone." Is it really? Other things can very easily take God's rightful place in your life. He will be faithful to show you whenever you are in danger of putting an idol in His place.

God wants the very best for you and the very best is always and only God. Get in the habit of choosing God afresh and anew each and every day. Make it a habit.

In Greek mythology, there's a story about Odysseus who sailed past the island of the sirens. Now, the sirens were women who had the power to charm all who listened to their singing and get them to come to their island. But their intent was evil. They killed everyone who came to their island. Odysseus wanted to hear the song of the sirens without endangering himself and his crew. So, he had the ears of his crew filled with wax while they tied him securely to the ship's mast. As a result, he was able to hear the siren's song, but he and the crew resisted the temptation to land on the island. There's another story from Greek mythology. Orpheus went with the Argonauts on a search for something called the Golden Fleece. When they sailed by this very same island – the siren's island - no one's ears were plugged up and no one was tied to the ship's mast. Instead, Orpheus played better music than the sirens. He so enchanted his crew with his superior melody that the siren's song was ineffective. Orpheus and the crew passed by the island safely.

We live in a world full of attractive but deadly idols. God doesn't keep you from hearing about all those other gods that are out there or from hearing their "song", so to speak. He doesn't bind you to Him by force. Instead, God just makes far better music. But you have to choose every day to listen to that music. If you will do that, then like Joshua you will leave nothing undone of what the Lord wants you to accomplish. You will finish well. Third and finally, Joshua made a habit of being fully devoted to God. In just the same way, you and I need to...

MAKE A HABIT OF BEING FULLY DEVOTED TO GOD.

There's a fascinating exchange between Joshua and the people of Israel there in Joshua 24. He encourages the people to keep on choosing the Lord and serve Him alone. How do the people respond? "The people replied, 'We would never abandon the LORD and serve other gods. ... So we, too, will serve the LORD, for he alone is our God.'" (Josh 24:16, 18 NLT) Then Joshua says something rather odd in reply, "Then Joshua warned the people, 'You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy and jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you abandon the LORD and serve other gods, he will turn against you and destroy you, even though he has been so good to you.'" (Josh 24:19-20 NLT) What's that about? Talk about being a "Negative Nelly"! But, no, Joshua wanted to remind the people that serving the Lord doesn't just happen automatically. Serving the Lord demands a deep level of devotion and commitment. It's as if Joshua says here, "Be careful! Don't be so sure of yourselves. Think about the depth of your commitment. Don't take it for granted that following the Lord is going to be easy or automatic. Realize what it means to be fully devoted to the Lord. This isn't something you do occasionally or when you feel like it."

What are some marks of a life that's fully devoted to the Lord? How do you know? Here's just a few to consider. First, it's a life full of the awe of God. That's really what the Old Testament phrase "the fear of the Lord" means. You never get over the thrill

that the God of the Universe has invited little you and little me to enter into an eternal relationship with great, big Him. Second, it's a life full of gratitude to God. You find yourself constantly thankful for His grace, His forgiveness, and His invitation to know Him better. Third, it's a life full of joy in God. You are enjoying God's acceptance of you and you're finding your ultimate purpose in this life. Fourth, it's a life full of obedience to God. You begin to do relationships His way. You handle your personal business His way. You become a person of greater and greater integrity. You let God change your inner character. Fifthly, it's a life full of service to God. Your love for lost people is growing because you realize how much they matter to God. Your love for fellow followers of Jesus is growing because they're a part of God's forever family along with you. You're increasingly using your time, talent and treasure to further His Kingdom. It's the difference between possessing life and experiencing abundant life.

Some years ago now, I came across this insightful observation by an English pastor named Graham Scroggie. "All Christians have eternal life; not all Christians have abundant life. We may serve, but never succeed. We may try but never triumph, and the difference all along the line is the difference between possessing life and experiencing life more abundant. This abundance of life is simply fullness of life in Jesus made possible by His death and resurrection and made real by the incoming of the Holy Spirit. That is abundant life. The trouble with many of us is that we are on the right side of Easter, but the wrong side of Pentecost; the right side of pardon, but the wrong side of power."

Hudson Taylor is a name every Christian should know. He was a great pioneer missionary to China in the 1800s. He was back home in England on one occasion looking for new missionary recruits to take back with him to China. As he sat thinking one day, he became conscious of some powerfully negative feelings filling his heart and mind. Suddenly, he felt so helpless, so unworthy, and so essentially useless in the service of God. Has that ever happened to you? It certainly has to me on occasion. But then there swept over Hudson Taylor this thought which was, no doubt, from the Holy Spirit Himself: "It's not what Hudson Taylor does for God that matters, but what God does through Hudson Taylor." From that day forward, Hudson Taylor began to live what he liked to call "the exchanged life." It was no longer Hudson Taylor, but Jesus that mattered. Something like that same experience will happen to you when you make a habit of being fully devoted to God. It's not what Rick Breusch does for God that matters, but what God does through Rick Breusch. If you're taking notes this morning, why not put your own name in those blanks on those message notes. Or, if you're just listening, put them in mentally. Then, just allow the Holy Spirit to drive home the truth of what it means to live an exchanged life – a life that's fully devoted to God. It's not what you do for God that matters, but what God does through you.

How do you get what you've been given spiritually? How do you become the person God wants you to be? Make a habit of trusting God. Make a habit of choosing God every day. And make a habit of being fully devoted to God. If you will do that, then like Joshua, you will leave nothing undone of what the Lord wants you to accomplish. You will get what you've been given. You will finish well.