

INI - SDG

9th Sunday a. Trinity

August 21, 2011

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Series: JOSHUA 08

Text: Joshua 23 - ***Now it came to pass, a long time after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age. 2 And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them: "I am old, advanced in age. 3 "You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you. 4 "See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward. 5 "And the LORD your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you. 6 "Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, 7 "and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them, 8 "but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day. 9 "For the LORD has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day. 10 "One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you. 11 "Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God. 12 "Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations -- these that remain among you -- and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you, 13 "know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you. 14 " Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed. 15 "Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you, so the LORD will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the LORD your God has given you. 16 "When you have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you."***

Theme: THE LORD FIGHTS FOR YOU

- The war is won
- Our battles continue

Dear fellow soldiers of the cross, fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

The current War on Terror has changed how we view war, hasn't it. In most wars of the past, our nation had clear cut enemies. They wore a particular uniform, fought as a unit, and were usually backed by a nation or government. We knew when the war came to an end because a treaty of some sort was usually signed, the fighting ended, and our soldiers came home. But our current War on Terror knows no such boundaries. The War on Terror is more a war against an ideology than a war against a nation. Those who hold the ideology of so-called Muslim extremists want to kill or convert anyone who is an infidel, or a non-Muslim. They don't wear a uniform or pledge allegiance to a certain country, but they abide by a certain way of thinking and religious view.

Because of the nature of the War on Terror, there may never be a clear-cut end. We may be winning the war, but that doesn't mean our battles against terrorists are over. Take Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance. We have defeated both former governments in those nations and new governments are now in place. I think we could say we won those wars. Yet there are battles that continue on against insurgents. Just over two weeks ago, 30 U.S. soldiers were killed when their helicopter was shot down in Afghanistan. While the war may be won, the battles wage on.

As we come to the closing chapters of our series on Joshua, we hear this morning General Joshua's farewell address to the people of Israel. As Joshua speaks to the leaders of Israel, they face a similar situation. The war was won. Israel now occupied Canaan. Joshua reminds them that this was because the LORD fought for them. Though the war was won, there were still battles that remained ahead of them. Battles in which they would be victorious only if the LORD fought for them. We find ourselves in the same position. Jesus fought for us and won the war, yet there are battles that remain. Battles in which we will be victorious only if the LORD fights for us. With that let us hear the Word of God recorded in Joshua chapter 23

So far the Word of God. And this is God's Word. Each word of it was breathed into the holy writer by God the Holy Spirit Himself. Because it is from God Himself, it is truth. And because it is truth we can base your life and eternal salvation on it. Therefore we pray, ***"Lord, sanctify us by Your truth, Your word is truth."*** Amen.

THE WAR IS WON

It is hard to imagine all the things that Joshua had seen the LORD do in his lifetime. He started out as a slave in Egypt, he witnessed the plagues and the Passover, he crossed the Red Sea on dry land, he ate the manna and drank water from a rock, he saw the rebellion in the wilderness, when Moses died he took over leading Israel, he led Israel across the Jordan River on dry ground, he saw the miraculous defeat of Jericho, he saw the sun stand still, and he had seen Israel take possession of the Promised Land of Canaan. Now in Joshua 23, the aged General is 110 years old and about to die. He could now say with Israel, ***"You know in your hearts and in your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you, and not one word of them has failed."*** Joshua and his audience knew that everything the LORD had promised to Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob had come to pass in their generation, just as the LORD had promised.

As Joshua gives his farewell speech he reminds the Children of Israel that they were able to take possession of the Promised Land only because the LORD fought for them. Verse 3, ***“You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you.”*** Israel was not victorious in this war because they were a military super power. In many of their battles they were out numbered and out gunned. Yet they had the Super Power of Almighty God fighting for them. ***“For the LORD has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day.”*** The Israelites were victorious in their war against the Canaanites only because it was the LORD who fought for them.

What the LORD did for the Children of Israel is a picture of what the LORD has done for us. Our war was not against “great and strong nations” like the Children of Israel faced. No, the enemies trying to keep us from entering the Promised Land of heaven were much more sinister and eternally destructive than the Hittites and Amorites.

One of the mighty enemies that was barring us from the Promised Land of heaven was our own sin. The sin we inherited from our parents. We were naturally sinful and enemies of God. Furthermore, when tempted to disobey, we have rebelled against the will of God time and time again.

Since we lost the war against sin ourselves, God sent His Champion, His own beloved Son Jesus to win the war against sin for us. The writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus ***“was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*** (Heb 4:15b) Jesus fought every sin that we are faced with. In the wilderness He was tempted with the sins of pride, greed, and idolatry. Yet in each case He defeated those temptations. He slew those temptations with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. His death on the cross was sacrifice to remove the debt of our sin. Jesus fought for us and won the war against sin.

Another one of our great enemies is death. We are powerless against death. We can do nothing to stop it or overcome it. Jesus also fought death for us. This enemy He charged head on when laid down His life on the cross. There Jesus died - just as Joshua died. Just like Joshua, He breathed His last and gave up the ghost. Like Joshua, the body of Jesus was laid in a tomb. But unlike Joshua, Jesus defeated death by rising from the dead three days later. And this victory God gives to us as well. ***“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (1 Cor 15:57)

And yet there still remained one enemy who is so crafty and so cunning, that he even led Adam and Eve in their state of perfection and holiness to sin against God and disobey His commandment. The crafty serpent who leads the whole world astray, wanted to lead us to spend an eternity in hell with him. So he fought against us to keep us out of the Promised Land of heaven with his temptations.

Because we were unable to win against the temptations of the devil, Jesus fought Him for us. Jesus is the One the LORD promised to Adam and Eve who would give a fatal head-blow to the devil while suffering only a bruised heel. Again we read in Hebrews that by His death on the cross Jesus ***“might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”*** (Heb 2:14b-15) Jesus fought the devil for us and won. We know He won because Jesus was not confined to the tomb, but Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. Jesus fights for us and has won the war

against sin, death, and the devil.

OUR BATTLES CONTINUE

You can imagine the temptation for the Israelites, can't you. They got what they wanted, they inherited the promised land, now it was time to kick back, relax, and enjoy the spoils of victory. Yet in his farewell address, General Joshua reminds them that while the war is won, the battles must continue. There were still heathen nations living among them, most notably the Philistines. The battles must continue to be faithful to the LORD their God, His commandments, drive out those heathen nations, and have nothing to do with their false gods.

Joshua reminds them of the same. ***“Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, and lest you go (or associate) among these nations, these who remain among you.”*** Joshua then commands them not to have anything to do with their false gods, but remain loyal and faithful to the LORD their God - to love Him above everything else.

Joshua warns them of what will happen if they were to intermarry with the heathen and join in the worship of their false gods, verse 13, ***“know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you...”*** Joshua goes on in verse 15, ***“Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.”*** Indeed, these battles would prove to be much more difficult for the Children of Israel to win than the battle against Jericho. Their only hope for victory in these on going spiritual battles is if the LORD continued to fight for them and give them the victory.

We face some of the same battles that Israel faced, don't we. We know all that Jesus has done to win the victory for us. We know our sins are forgiven through His death and resurrection. We know His resurrection from the dead means that we will rise too. And we know that in Christ the gates of hell cannot prevail against us. And sometimes knowing we have all these spiritual blessings in Christ we think the battle is over. We think that it no longer matters what we do or say, we are forgiven and that we are going to heaven no matter what.

Well, to the sin-troubled conscience the cross of Christ is great comfort and assurance. Yet when we feel comfortable in our sins and comfortable with our relationship with the unbelieving world around us, we must remember these words of Joshua. The LORD who is faithful in delivering the good things He has promised us, is also faithful in delivering the harmful threats to those who despise Him and His Word.

Though the war is won, we must battle on against the temptations of our sinful flesh and the temptations of the world around us. The world has a way of making its sinful behavior look appealing. As though it is fun and if we don't join in, we are missing out. Our sinful flesh wants to go right along with it. If left to ourselves, we will lose that battle every time. But thanks be to God that He continues to fight for us. He has given us His Holy Spirit which wars against our old Adam. And through Jesus Christ our Lord, God delivers us from our this body of death. Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that has spoken to us in His Word. ***Take diligent heed***, as Joshua says, ***to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God*** who fights for you.

It is a rather confusing situation we have in Iraq and Afghanistan. The war is largely won, but the battles continue. But in that, we are reminded of our own spiritual condition. Jesus fights for us and has won the war. He has given us the victory over sin, death, and the devil. He gives us the Promised Land of heaven as His free gift of grace. Yet our daily battles against sin still continue. Daily battles which can only be won if Jesus continues to fight for us. Therefore let us continue hold fast to the LORD our God who fights for us, as we have done to this day. Amen.