

September 1, 2019

Joshua 23:1-13

You're in a good spot. You're white-water rafting. How many of you have rafted the rapids? You're white-water rafting; you've just gone through a set of rapids; you're wet, you're tired, but you're still in your boat, exhilarated. You're in a good place. And you have a better place ahead of you - after more rapids, after the gully-rush past the canyon walls - ahead of you, a quiet pool with sandy shores - a wonderful place to rest.

You're in Colorado, climbing a Fourteener - a mountain peak 14 thousand some feet above sea level. You've just gotten round that narrow spot along the cliff, who knows how many feet up, and how many feet down. You're winded, and wired. You've made it so far. You're in a good place. And you have a better place ahead of you - the top of the mountain looking out and around at the mountain peaks all around you.

You're in the airport. You just got off the plane at the terminal way over there, and you've made it all the way across the airport to where your next flight boards. You've checked your boarding pass, too many times; you've checked those departure screens, too many times; you've made it to your gate, the right gate, on time. You're in a good place. And you have a better place ahead of you - the dream vacation spot you've been waiting for, time together with someone you love.

You're in a good place, with a better place ahead of you. But. You knew that was coming, didn't you? You're in a good place, with a better place ahead of you, but on your left, but on your right, what do you see? A short-cut, an easier way out, a distraction. You hear the voices: "Don't get hung up on the rocks." "Don't cross the scree field." "Don't get distracted; don't lose sense of your time. Don't miss..." But you hear another set of voices. "It's a short-cut; trust me. It'll be easier; trust me. It'll be more fun; trust me." You hear the voices: "No guts, no glory. Don't be such a \_\_\_\_\_. You have to live a little!" You hear the voices calling you to take the short cut off God's way, to skip out on what God has given you to do, after all - they say - God's way is too hard, too long, too boring. At school, at work, you hear the voices calling you to take the short-cut. You hear the voices

calling you to take the easy way out, to lie, to cheat, to bully your way. You hear the voices distracting you, calling you to live it up and blow your budget, calling you to live it up and fix your bad day with a good beer too many, calling you to live it up and take a peek on the dirty side of the internet. You're in a good place, with a better place ahead of you, but to the left, but to the right, you hear voices promising a better place, a better rest, a better reward.

So what do you do? Do you take the short-cut? Do you take the easy way out? Do you let yourselves get suckered into the distraction?

Joshua and his people were in a good place. God had delivered them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. He had led them and fed them through the Sinai Wilderness and across the Jordan River. Now God was giving them the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Joshua and his people were in a good place. And soon, Joshua knew, he was headed to an even better place - heaven. And his people, well, Joshua knew his people. He knew how they liked the short cut. He knew how they liked the easy way out. He knew how they liked the distractions of the world around them. So Joshua says: "Don't. Don't go to the left. Don't go to the right. Don't take the short-cut. Don't take the easy way out. Don't get distracted. Don't."

"Don't" isn't always an easy thing to hear; "don't" isn't always a fun thing to hear. So, how do you hear Joshua? Like a crusty, grumpy, old curmudgeon who can't stand to see his people doing things a bit differently, having some fun? Or do you hear Joshua loving and wise, speaking with the heart of God, speaking with the wisdom of God? I don't know what Joshua sounded like. When we're saying things that need to be said (when we're shouting things that need to be shouted), we don't always sound the way we want to sound. And when we're hearing things that need to be heard, we don't always hear them the way we need to hear them. So how did Joshua sound to his people? How would Joshua sound to us? I don't know. But I do know this about God. When the holy, almighty God says, "Don't," sometimes he might whisper, but sometimes he lets it out full-throttled, full-throated, with thunder and lightning. And woe to the stubborn fool who

dares to argue with God: “Don’t tell me ‘don’t.’ I’ll do what I want to do.” Woe to that stubborn fool. Why? God has a long history of striking the one who argues with him, a long history of striking that stubborn fool down. Are you thinking what I’m thinking? “Yikes.” “Yikes, and God have mercy.”

And “Thank you, Lord!” Why? God has even longer history of calling the stubborn fool back, a long history of calling this stubborn fool back, a long history of calling you back - with Jesus. Jesus didn’t get fooled by short-cuts that lead to dead ends. He didn’t get fooled by Satan’s promises of an easier way out. He didn’t get suckered by distractions promising a better life than what God had to offer. No, Jesus didn’t give up his good place with God; he didn’t risk his better place with God. In life and in death, Jesus lived the life God gave him to live; in life and in death, Jesus gave the life God gave him to give. For you, for me. For the times we got distracted, for the times we took the easy way out, for the times we took the short-cut. Jesus took our place and paid the price. Jesus took our place and got it right. What does that get to mean for us? With Jesus, God counts his [Jesus’] life as your life; he counts Jesus’ death as your death. That means, with Jesus, you’re in a good place with God. And with Jesus, you have an even better place with God ahead of you!

You have an even better place with God ahead of you! With Jesus, you have heaven ahead of you. Talk about a better place! No more death or mourning or crying or pain. No fear, no guilt. No more kicking ourselves: “shoulda, woulda, coulda.” No more getting kicked: “You shoulda, woulda, coulda.” After the rapids of this life, after getting hung up on the rocks of this life and twisted around - the quiet, peaceful waters of heaven. After the long, hard climbs of this life, we’ll have made it to the top - with wow and wonder all around. After all the worrying of this life - “Will I make it? - the right place, the right time, the right connection” - we’ll have it made - together with God in the paradise of God. So don’t, don’t get distracted to the left, don’t get distracted to the right. You’re in a good place with God, with an even better place ahead of you. Amen.