

August 18, 2019

Joshua 23:14-16

Some day you'll meet her in heaven, twirling her cane and whistling on the way to church. Marie was a German-Russian, as strong as an ox and as stubborn as a mule. In her eighties, she'd be walking to church, 8 in the morning; summer, winter, rain or shine, didn't seem to stop her. If her arthritis wasn't acting up, you could expect to see her walking down the gravel road, dodging potholes, twirling her cane like a baton, whistling through her dentures. One day she was in the hospital, didn't really expect to make it. Her family was there; I don't think they expected her to make it, either. I was visiting her there at the hospital. I got too close. Marie saw her opportunity, and she took it. She grabbed my arm with a vise-like grip that wasn't about to let go. She looked up at me and - for what seemed to be the next fifteen minutes - she preached a sermon on Jesus. While she was talking, not once did she let up her grip, not once did she look away from me. And yet, the whole time, she wasn't really talking to me, she was sharing Jesus and his church with her children who could be oh, so stubborn about not really needing, so stubborn about having enough of Jesus and his church. Marie saw her opportunity, and she took it - she talked the talk that needed to be talked. A couple days later Marie was back up on her feet, as strong as an ox and as stubborn as a mule.

Last month we had our annual Raddatz family vacation. Dad got out the funeral plans. He didn't pick out a sermon text; he figured the pastor would know what to say. And I figure he's made it clear to the pastor what he's made clear to us - "Don't make it about me; it's not about me; it's about Jesus." He shared the hymns that he was asking, asking to be sung. "*Not unto us, not unto us be glory*" - why? it's not about us, it's about Jesus. "*Jesus, your blood and righteousness my beauty are*" - why? he remembers hearing his mom and dad singing that hymn in church, one generation to another generation. And "*This is the Threefold Truth on which our faith depends - Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!*" Why? Life isn't about us; life is about Jesus!

What do you want to pass on to the people living after you? Something more than the Cubs or the Bears, right? Or even readin' writin' and

arithmetic. When you have the opportunity to pass on the best words of life, what will your last words be? When will they be? Think about it - when will your last words be? Why will they be? I imagine you have something important to share, something important from the heart. So, why wait?

Joshua knew it was time, time for his last words. So he gathers the leaders of his people. And what does he say? He reminds them of the good-old days, not just the good-old days of fun and games, but the good days of God's blessing - "Remember how God has blessed us." And then for his last words, Joshua shared some timeless truths. **"Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed."**

Joshua shared the timeless truth - we have a God who keeps his promises! His promises might be as strange as: walk around the walls of Jericho, give out a shout, and the walls will come tumbling down. His promises might as counter-intuitive, as twisted as: **"Seek first the kingdom of God, follow me first, and I'll give you whatever you need."** His promises might be more than we could ever imagine: **"Whoever believes shall not perish but have eternal life."** For all the promises God gives us, Joshua shared the timeless truth - we have a God who keeps his promises!

Then Joshua shared another timeless truth - "You don't want to cross God. You don't want to lose out on his great promises."

I tried to fit those two great timeless truths together - "You have a God who keeps his promises, but you don't want to cross him; you don't want to lose out on his promises." I tried to fit those truths together, but I couldn't. Why? I cross God. I contradict him. I stand in his way. I cross God and I deserve to have him pull all his promises out from under me. And that same thing is true for you. Each of us has crossed God, contradicted God, stood in God's way. And we all deserve to have to have God pull his promises out from under us. So - we have crossed God, and we have a God who keeps his promises. How can we have both?

The answer is Jesus. Because we crossed God, we deserved to be crossed, crossed out by God. Instead, God crossed Jesus. On the cross, he cursed him, crushed him. He treated Jesus as the double-crosser. He treated Jesus as the one who contradicted him, argued against him. He treated Jesus as the one who stood in his way. He treated Jesus as the one who had left him. But Jesus didn't. He didn't leave God; he didn't turn against God; he didn't give up on God. To his dying breath, he held on to God's promise, trusting God - **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."** And as God does, God kept his promise. He raised Jesus back to life. And not only that, God counted Jesus' death as your death and Jesus' life as your life, so that with Jesus, God counts you right, right for his promises, right for his life, right for his love.

In Jesus, with Jesus, God's two timeless truths stand. Without Jesus, all we have is "Watch out, you better not cross God, or else." With Jesus, we have - even after we have crossed God, with Jesus we have a God who keeps his promises.

Those timeless truths don't come to us naturally. Those timeless truths aren't electives - pick and choose what you want. Holding to those timeless truths isn't just a lifestyle choice, Cubs, Sox, Pepsi, Coke. No, holding to those timeless truths is life with God. And passing those truths on, passing those truths on is passing on the life and the love of God. What could be more important to pass on to the next generation? Really, what could be more important?

I asked, "What will your last words be? When will your last words be? We don't know when, do we? But we do know what ... we do know who to talk about, don't we? Amen.