

Three Funerals and a Wedding

Joshua 24:29-33

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Tomorrow is Memorial Day, and it is appropriate that we close our study of Joshua on the Sunday before Memorial Day. Memorial Day used to be called Decoration Day because it was when people all over our nation decorated the graves of those who had given their lives defending our nation and for the cause of liberty.

Dr. Al Mohler did a nice piece on Memorial Day on *The Briefing* this past Friday. I want to read a bit of it. It is a longer quote than I usually use but bear with me because it fits with our closing of Joshua.

One thing that Christians need to recognize is that even as we may be living in a time in which there's a war against creation, a war against morality, a war against reality [ontology] . . . there is a sobering reality is death. There is a sobering message that is found in a cemetery. [A] cemetery has a very important word to say. How we honor those who are dead says NOT so much about them as it does about us. A nation that doesn't have gratitude in its heart toward those who, especially, on the front lines gave up their lives for the cause of liberty, is a nation that no longer deserves that liberty. We're living in a time of such rampant confusion and a part of that confusion comes down to whether or not wars are even worth fighting. But even beyond that controversy, there's an understanding of our own history that at times, wars were absolutely necessary, and in a fallen world, it is unlikely to say . . . that war will not be made necessary again . . . And when soldiers and sailors and airmen and others in the American uniform die and they die in the cause of liberty and in the defense of this nation, it is then a test of the nation as to whether or not they are honored and remembered, their sacrifice documented and at times, yes, even their graves decorated on Decoration Day. We are, indeed, a society that is losing moral sanity, but there's at least some sanity perhaps that is recovered in a cemetery. When there's a solemnity and a sense of gravity, death making a very clear statement that Christians fully understand and representing an accountability that must be met not only by individuals, but in the larger sense of Memorial Day by the nation as well.¹

As we wrap up Joshua, we have seen the war that Israel waged in order to claim the land God promised to them. And now, as we come to the end of the book of Joshua, we see the promises of God fulfilled, and instead of them standing in eternal glory, they are standing in a cemetery observing three funerals and *memorializing* three of the most faithful leaders in the history of Israel: Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar.

Here is what we are going to do this morning. We are going to look at the lives of Joseph, Eleazar, and Joshua. We are going to look at how the grief of these three funerals teaches us about the faithfulness of our

¹ <https://albertmohler.com/2021/05/28/briefing-5-28-21>.

God. We will also see that these three leaders are shadows of the Ultimate Leader God sent, who is Prophet, Priest, and King—the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, there is a redemptive narrative that runs through all of the Bible, and these three funerals point us not to a funeral at the end of Scripture but to the most amazing wedding and celebration the world will ever see. It will be a wedding that you will be part of *IF* you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we read vv. 29-33, the writer places the funeral of Joseph between Joshua and Eleazar. I want to begin with Joseph's funeral, then cover Eleazar's funeral, and conclude with Joshua's funeral. I want to look back at God's giving of the promise, then work to the priestly mediation of the promise and conclude with God's man leading the nation to complete the promise.

I want to give you *three phrases* to hang your thoughts on as we walk through the text: *The Promise Prophesied, The Promise Mediated, The Promised Completed.*

I. The Promise Prophesied (v. 32)

When we consider the burial and funeral for the patriarch Joseph, we are really looking at the conclusion of the *Pentateuch*. I realize Joshua is not part of the *Pentateuch* but what we find in the *book of Joshua* is the fulfillment of the promise of an inheritance given to Israel. This promise was made in Genesis, the first book in the *Pentateuch*, and when Joshua closes with Joseph's funeral, it is concluding the promises made to Abraham all the way back in Genesis. Look at v. 32:

As for the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem, in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money. It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph.

As we look at the patriarch Joseph, we are looking at more than a patriarch. We are looking at a patriarch that functioned as a prophet. God gave Joseph dreams and visions that he shared with others in the same way the prophets did.

Joseph saw the day that Yahweh would deliver the people of Israel from Egypt and told his brothers that God would lead them back to the Promised Land, and they were to take his body with them. Listen to what he said at the end of Genesis (Genesis 50:24-25):

And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."²⁵ Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here."

Before Joseph died, He reiterated the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and then prophesied that God would visit the people of Israel and take them back to Canaan because he was certain this would happen; he told them to carry his bones back.

The New Testament book of Hebrews has been very helpful as we have worked through Joshua, and once again, Hebrews helps us understand the Old Testament. In Hebrews 11:17-22, the writer of Hebrews seems to indicate that the promise of salvation that Joseph saw was not simply the Promised Land but also the resurrection of God's people. Listen to Hebrew 11:17-22:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son,¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise

him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. ²⁰ *By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.* ²¹ *By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.* ²² *By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.*

The writer of Hebrews tells us that Abraham believed in the resurrection, so it is not unthinkable that Joseph would have believed as well. I believe that God gave Joseph a bigger vision of the promise than simply land. Hebrews seems to indicate that Joseph believed the promise God had made to His people was bigger, better, and more than he could ever imagine.

It is no accident that at the end of Joshua, we are standing at the graveside service of the great patriarch, Joseph. There were promises made to the patriarchs, but all of them died. The people of Israel must have been thinking, and we should be thinking as well, *“There is a problem. There has to be something better. There has to be more. It can’t just end this way.”* That’s good. Keep thinking that. Now, look at v. 33.

II. The Promise Mediated (v. 33)

Now let’s consider *salvation mediated* in v. 33.

And Eleazar the son of Aaron died, and they buried him at Gibeah, the town of Phinehas his son, which had been given him in the hill country of Ephraim.

In Numbers 20:22-29, which was in the wilderness, Eleazar was installed as the new high priest after his father Aaron died. The role of the high priest was to mediate between God and God’s people. He was the mediator of the promise of God to save His people.

Here is how this worked. Once a year, on The Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the most important room in the temple or, in Joshua’s day, the Tabernacle. This room was called the Holy of Holies.

In the Holy of Holies, the priest kept the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was a very large golden box with the figures of angels on top. The angels’ wings were outstretched over the top of the Ark so that the tips of their wings touched. This place was called the Mercy Seat and was considered God’s throne.

Inside the Ark of the Covenant was Aaron’s rod and the stone tablets that contained the Ten Commandments. The Holy of Holies was the most holy place in the temple or Tabernacle. There was a massive curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. You could not see in the Holy of Holies. So, when the high priest walked into the Holy of Holies, they tied a rope tied around his ankle because if he entered the Holy of Holies, then entered God’s presence unprepared he would die. If he died in there, they used the rope to pull him out. Then it is next man up.

On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies, and he would take blood, the blood of the sacrifice to offer for his own sins before he sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat for the sins of the people. This annual offering was such a powerful offering that it reset everything back to the condition of holiness. It purified the people by covering any conceivable sin they may have overlooked. Yet, it had to be offered every year by a high priest who was himself a sinner.

Here is the problem. The high priest was a sinner, and because he was under the curse of sin, it meant that one day he would die. This was what happened to Eleazar. He died, and then his son Phinehas replaced him. Phinehas picked up where his father left off, and on and on, the succession of high priests went throughout the whole of the Old Testament.

Eleazar's life screams out the problem—every high priest died. Again, we should be thinking, *“There has to be something better. There has to be more. There has to be more than an endless cycle of death?”*

III. The Promise Competed (vv. 29-31)

Finally, in Joshua, we see the promise of salvation of the people of Israel completed. Now, we may think, *“Ah, this is it. Finally, a deliverer who saw the promise, who served faithfully, and who God used in amazing ways to bring the promise to fulfillment. Now, we have arrived because, in Joshua, we see a king-like leader who is faithful to God. Right?”* Well, let's see. Look in vv. 29-31:

After these things Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being 110 years old.³⁰ And they buried him in his own inheritance at Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash.³¹ Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel.

Oops! There's that problem! Just like Joseph and Eleazar—Joshua died. Although God fulfilled His promise to His people of giving them an inheritance in the Promised Land where they are in God's place living under God's rule, there is still a problem—death reigns! The curse of sin is still in effect because Joshua still died.

Then there is another problem. When Joshua died, so did the commitment of the people of Israel to Yahweh, to His word, to His Law, and to His covenant. The next book of Judges begins a continuous cycle of God's people being disobedient to God, then God's people cry out to Him, God sends a deliverer, the people are disciplined and then delivered. Yet, like Joshua, every judge and prophet, and priest that led the people died, and the cycle continued. Disobedience and death reigned in God's leaders and God's people.

When we read the history of ancient Israel, it can leave us in despair. It leaves us wanting more and longing for something better. It should leave us feeling that way.

You may be thinking, *“Well, that was then, but this is now. We know better now. We don't live in that ancient outdated culture and archaic religious system. We are modern. We know better.”*

However, if you are truly honest, when you read Israel's in the Old Testament, you know you are reading your story. You know you see yourself in them.

You see, we all try to be our own prophets, priests, and kings. We want to predict our own outcomes, mediate our own way to God and bark out commands like a king and call our own shots. We do not want to submit to anyone.

If you're not a Christian, here is how it works. You just want to live your own life according to your own rules you make up. You try to be a good person, and perhaps you do okay for a while. You are able to live up to your own standards. Then something hard or bad or something that throws off the rhythm of your life happens and you simply cannot keep your own code of ethics.

If this is you, then I have even more bad news. You see, you break your own laws all the time, and you believe there is very little consequence. You think, *“Oh, I made a mistake. This is a miserable experience, but I only answer to me. I am king. It is my life. I may be miserable or depressed for a while, but that is it.”*

Here is the bad news. What you may not realize is that you have broken God's laws and what you do not know will result in your spending eternity in Hell experiencing eternal death. What you may not have realized yet is that you are not a prophet, priest, or a king, but there is One who is, and you will stand before Him. He is the One to whom you must give an account for your life, and it is before Him that you must stand in judgment. He is the One who can cast your soul into Hell.

So, if you are NOT a Christian, I have good news for you. Here is what is needed. There needs to be one more funeral. Your funeral.

You need to die to yourself, your love of sin, your love of being your own prophet, priest, and king and be made alive to the True Prophet, Priest, and King—the Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. You need to repent of your sin and, by faith—look to Christ as your Eternal Prophet, Priest, and King who will never die, never leave you, never abandon you or forsake you.

God knew we needed more. He knew we needed something better than sinful leaders who die because of their sin. He knew we needed a Savior who is THE eternal Prophet, Priest, and King.

So, from the very beginning, when sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, God had been preparing the world to send His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be the fulfillment of the role of the Prophet, the Priest, and our King.

Jesus came as the Ultimate Prophet, True High Priest, and King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He came and lived His life as our substitute, then died our death on the cross. He was buried, but then on the third day, He rose from the dead and defeated the last enemy—death. With His resurrection from the dead, He removed the curse of sin and death from His people.

The curse of death that no leader could avoid Jesus destroyed by His resurrection from the dead. Now all of those who look to King Jesus in faith as the One who took our curse will live not only in this life but will have eternal life because death no longer has power over you. You will be raised to new life at the moment of new birth, and when you die, you will live forever in Heaven with God.

In Jesus, we have an Eternal Prophet who eternally gives us His word through His Holy Spirit. By the word of the Eternal Prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, He calls us from spiritual death to spiritual life and makes us from now on willing and ready to live for Him.

As our Great High Priest, Jesus entered the Holy of Holies not to offer the blood of animals for His sin and then for ours, but He entered the Holy of Holies in the highest heavens and offered His own sinless life and His blood once for all for our sin. His sacrifice for our sin is so powerful that it cleanses the hearts and lives of God's people for all time and all eternity.

When Jesus entered the Holy of Holies, He ripped the curtain in the temple that separated sinners from God. He made a way for us to be purified by His blood so that we may boldly enter the presence of God and not be consumed. We can come boldly before God because our Great High Priest sits at the right hand of God, making intercession for us continually and eternally. And because Jesus was truly human, He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses in every respect because He has been tempted in every way, and yet He never sinned. So, when we stumble or fall flat on our faces in sin, He is there to pick us up. In His grace, He calls us to repentance because he loves us and says to God the Father—This one is Mine! I bought him, and I bought her. They are precious to me.

Finally, as our Eternal Living King, Jesus reigns not only in this world but also in our hearts. He is our King who leads us into battle with our enemy Satan and our sin. He has come to break the cycle not with external commands but by giving us His resurrected life and His Holy Spirit. He is able to give us His resurrected life because He is the King who gave His life for us on the cross to free us from our curse of sin and the sentence of eternal death in Hell. Next week, we begin our journey through Acts, and we will see how our King leads us to be His witnesses, and He sends out to the ends of the earth to proclaim liberty to the captives and see King Jesus set them free.

So, as I close this sermon and we come to the end of the book of Joshua, we are standing at the graves of three of Israel's most famous leaders who died. *What have we learned? So, what do these three funerals teach us?*

First, death comes to all, so we need to get wisdom before we die. All of Israel's leaders, both great and small—died. There is not one person who has ever beaten death—save One—Jesus Christ. Other than Him, we will all die. You may exercise on a regular basis, eat right, live cautiously by not taking risks, but the fact is you will still die. I'm not saying eating right and exercise is bad. Be a good steward of your physical health but do not put too much confidence in the flesh. Your biceps and six-pack abs will be of no advantage in heaven, but the word of God-driven deep in your heart over a lifetime will.

So, what do we need to do? Ecclesiastes 7:2, 4 calls us to get wisdom when we go to funerals and when we stand in cemeteries. Ecclesiastes 7:2, 4 says:

It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart . . . The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.

To go to the house of mourning and get wisdom is to face the stark reality that death comes to all and because it does, it should shape how we live. In other words, we live like we are dying.

If you are not a Christian, you need to get wisdom. You need to have your own funeral right now by dying to yourself right now and letting Jesus raise you to a new life in Him. I will be happy to talk with you . . .

Second, God's keeps His promises. To stand at the graveside of these three is to realize that God's word, God's promises, and therefore God, Himself, is our only hope. We have seen this continually throughout the book of Joshua.

And although these faithful men died by faith, they looked to the One True Prophet, Priest, and King that God promised to send to save His people and take them to the True Promised Land. You see, God's people are people of promise, and they trust in the promise that anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved from eternal death and given eternal life.

As the people of God's promise, there is one funeral and burial that Christians will never memorialize and one cemetery that Christians never go to, and that is the burial place of King of Kings and Lord of Lords—Jesus Christ. He is not dead. He is alive!

There never was a funeral for the Eternal Prophet, Priest, and King because after He died, He rose from the dead on the third day. He is the eternal Prophet, Priest, and King, and whoever trusts in Him will receive all the promises of God.

Third, God invites us to a wedding. So, while the book of Joshua ends with us standing at the graveside of three funerals, the Bible does not end that way. The Bible ends with the book of The Revelation of Jesus Christ. This book ends with us being part of the Marriage and Wedding Supper of the Lamb of God—the Lord Jesus Christ who is celebrating the receiving of His Bride the church into His eternal home—heaven. Listen to Revelation 19:6-10:

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹ And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are

invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”¹⁰ Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Here is the choice that stands before you this morning: *A funeral or wedding?* Which one will you attend? If you reject the invitation of Lord Jesus Christ to attend His wedding, then all that is left for you is a funeral. However, if you repent of your sin and trust in Christ, then it is not a funeral that you look forward to; it is a wedding party with Jesus.