



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

FAITHFUL to the end

"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD," Joshua 24:15.

Based on two sermons preached by Rev Ivan Foster in Gilford Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day, August 7th, 2016.

The final days of Joshua present a model for us all to note and heed. It is to be noticed that verse 29 tells us that the events recorded in this chapter are followed by the death of the great man of God. "And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old." It is clear that to the end, Joshua was faithful to the Lord and was most anxious to promote faithfulness amongst the people of God by tackling head on the issues that were threatening Israel's spiritual well-being and future.

What a perfect paragon the man is for us all, especially the servants of God. I have lived with the words of old Pastor J Kyle Paisley, spoken to me just after I started my studies in the Free Church: "It is not how you start that counts but how you finish!" Joshua finished well.

Paul the apostle obviously had the aspiration to achieve the same finish to his life's work. In Acts 20 he said to the elders of Ephesus: "The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God," Acts 20:23-24.

Some years later, as he knew his life was drawing to an end, he said: "The time of my departure is at hand," 2 Timothy 4:6. And in the face of that wonderful event he was able to declare: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing," verses 7-8.

Let such be the holy ambition of us all who love the Lord.

In this chapter please note:

I. THE OBJECTIVE OF A GOOD MAN

"And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God," Joshua 24:1. This was his final act. As we have noted, he died after these events took place.

1. To the end of his life he cared only for the wellbeing of the people of God. He wanted only that the people of God 'serve' the Lord. It is the same word as is translated 'dress' in Genesis 2:15. What an instructive picture that presents! We should be engaged in looking after God's garden until the last day of our lives.

2. Joshua sought to keep the history of God's mercy before the people. Verses 2-13. Please note that every blessing and victory were the direct result of God's sovereign grace! What an aid to holiness is the knowledge of our own helplessness!

3. This was the basis of his call for renewed consecration. "Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD," Joshua 24:14. "Now therefore", or "in the light of what it is we owe to God, let us fear and serve Him."



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

Notice how the old sins cling on! Joshua says, "Put away the gods which your fathers served." The old ways of the flesh linger on and will re-assert themselves given half a chance.

Notice too that holiness consists in 'putting away' sin. Holiness is separation, something that needs to be learned again today. The days of blessing, through which the Free Presbyterian Church passed in the 60s and 70s, were days of separation. Men, women, families, left behind the gods of Ecumenism and Romanism, Modernism and Liberal Theology, cast such all aside and followed the Lord Jesus outside the camp. Such were the people who built the churches that sprang up in those years.

II. THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HEART

"And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods, And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD," Joshua 24:16, 21. Joshua knew that, despite their strong assertions of allegiance to God, they were not free of the old sins, certainly not as free as the people might have believed themselves to be. There was self-deception at work. God's people invariably hold a higher view of their state than is true.

We sing: "Change and decay in all around I see." However, we rarely notice the changes in our own hearts and lives. We need honestly before God to search our own hearts in the light of His holy Word.

Search me, O God! my actions try,
And let my life appear
As seen by Thine all-searching eye —
To me my ways make clear.

Throw light into the darkened cells,
Where passion reigns within;
Quicken my conscience till it feels
The loathsomeness of sin.

Search all my thoughts, the secret springs,
The motives that control;
The chambers where polluted things
Hold empire o'er the soul.

Search, till Thy fiery glance has cast
Its holy light thro' all,
And I by grace am brought at last
Before Thy face to fall.

Thus prostrate I shall learn of Thee,
What now I feebly prove,
That God alone in Christ can be
Unutterable love!

There was a work done under Joshua's instruction at that time but it didn't last too long. "And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey," Joshua 24:24. But as with every



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

generation, this consecration to God was short-lived! "And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel," Joshua 24:31.

After that, the drift backwards began.

Free Presbyterian, the "things . . . written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope," Romans 15:4. How have we done over the last 60 years? Do we stand where once we stood, or has a drift set in?

There is only one HONEST answer to that question.

III. THE SOLEMN WITNESS TO THEIR PROFESSION OF OBEDIENCE

"And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God," Joshua 24:26-27.

There have been stones raised in our history as memorials and witnesses to the oath of allegiance to God which our denomination has sworn.

1. The ordination oath of every elder and minister is a memorial stone of our stand for God. What a solemn oath is taken by every Free Presbyterian minister and elder! Part of that oath contains the following undertaking.

"Will you maintain with all the strength God shall give the truly Scriptural separation position of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster and vigorously withstand the apostasy of Irish Presbyterianism exhorting God's people to obey the teaching and commandments of 1 Timothy 6:3-5?"

Those verses read: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but dotting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself."

This is a declaration of war against the opponents of God's truth. That is the position the Free Presbyterian Church took up from the beginning.

2. The signed covenant in every minister's room is a memorial stone of our stand for God! In 1988, on 28th February which was the 350th anniversary of the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant in Scotland by our Presbyterian forefathers, the Free Presbyterian Church, throughout its congregations, gave their signature to a very solemn oath. Part of it read: We "solemnly covenant together, by His grace, to stand with Christ in this evil day, for all that He is for, and against all that He is against."

How many Free Presbyterians are today standing with IRA terrorists, with ecumenists, Christ deniers and sodomites? That cannot be gainsaid! There are some Free Presbyterians today doing what they railed on others for doing but a few short years ago. I know they are doing wrong for they condemned others for doing what they now do! "Thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I: yea, thine own lips testify against thee," Job 15:6.

3. The sermons and protests over the years are memorial stones of our stand for God. There are thousands of them on record in the libraries of our churches and they will witness against us one day. What an awful thing it is when our own words rise up to condemn us for our backslidings and departures!

4. Many of the church buildings are memorial stones to our witness and stand in Ulster. Most of



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

them were built, like the walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day, amidst the opposition of Christ's enemies. What battles were fought with council officials who were spurred on by local ecumenists who wished to stop at any cost the spread of the gospel witness of the Free Presbyterian Church!

5. The bitter hatred of the enemy is a memorial stone to our stand for God. It lives on today whenever a note is sounded from the old gospel trumpet. There is a hatred of any sounding of the war trumpet of Free Presbyterianism of 40-60 years ago.

The Belfast Telegraph and other ecumenical propaganda sheets may have lauded some for their actions in setting up the power-sharing government with the IRA in 2007 but the lion's roar may still be heard when there is a lifting up of the sweet sound of heaven's message by which hell's lies are refuted!

Yes, there are many stones to be seen all around that serve to remind us where once we stood and the God we once served with joy "in sincerity and in truth."

IV. IN THIS PASSAGE WE HAVE A SAD REMINDER OF THE BREVITY OF OUR FAITHFULNESS.

"And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel," Joshua 24:31. But then they denied the Lord.

"And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth," Judges 2:7-13.

Is that going to be the path that we follow? If it is, please note how it will end. "And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed," Judges 2:14-15.

Is that the heritage we will leave our children?

1. We do not readily acknowledge our tendency to unfaithfulness. We are exact copies of the disciples. "Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples," Matthew 26:31-35.

We readily deceive ourselves with notions of our own strength!

2. This pattern of weakness was seen in the apostolic church. Paul wrote to the Galatians: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel," Galatians 1:6. That was but approximately 30 years after Pentecost. The seven churches of Asia are another example. Remember Revelation 3:20? How well known are its words and how relevant they are to our subject.



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Here is a departure from Christ and that by a first generation apostolic church!

There are many other examples to be found in the epistles of the New Testament. Paul said to the Ephesian elders: "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears," Acts 20:27-31.

What a warning these words sound to the Free Presbyterian people in 2016!

3. Ecclesiastical history has borne repeated testimony to this evil tendency. The churches of the revival days here in Ulster in 1859, and the 1920s-30s are today held fast in the grip of the devil.

Will this happen to the people of the revival days of 1965-80?

Yes, it will. Indeed it is already happening and can only get worse unless there is fearing of "the LORD" and a serving Him in "sincerity and in truth" and a putting away of the gods which have been raised amongst us, the gods of worldliness and carnality, of greed and materialism and uncleanness.

Were there a turning from these gods, what mighty changes there would be in the Free Presbyterian Church! What a forsaking of organisations and institutions which have abandoned God's Word and are walking in the paths of sin.

What an uproar amongst those who have been rejoicing over the departures they have been encouraging amongst the ranks of the Free Presbyterian Church.

May the Lord spoil the enemy of the prey he believes he has gained as David robbed the lion, and the bear, and delivered the lamb snatched from his flock, 1 Samuel 17:34-35.

Christian, pray for such an intervention, such a deliverance in these days.

"And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me," Psalm 50:15.