



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Joshua 16:1 - 17:18

Winter 2021

"Fortifying The Feeble"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning to all of you. Good to see you here. Our text this morning is in the Book of Joshua. We're coming toward the end of our study in the next few weeks. But we're going to look at two chapters; 16 and 17. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on chapter 16, mainly in chapter 17. The gist of chapter 16 is the boundaries of the tribe of Ephraim. It begins with a kind of general description of the sons of Joseph and then it gives specifics as to the boundary of the tribe of Ephraim. And then chapter 17 is the boundary of the tribe of Manasseh. I'm going to comment on those boundaries and the significance of them, but we're going to concentrate on the conversations that take place on two different occasions in chapter 17.

And I'll begin with verse 10 of chapter 16 but then skip down to verse 3 of 17 and read two of those verses where they have a conversation between Joshua and Eleazar the high priest, and the five daughters of Zelophehad. And this is a passage that really goes back to Numbers 17 with a conversation with Moses. These daughters were the only children that Zelophehad had. He didn't have a son. And so who's to inherit his inheritance? Who is his inheritance to go to? And Moses deals with that and promises it to these five daughters, with some restrictions. And so they now come to Joshua and ask for that inheritance which Moses promised them.

And then we'll look at mainly the conversation that the tribe of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, have with Joshua beginning with verse 12 of chapter 17. First of

all, in chapter 16, the inheritance, the tribal territory is given. And then in verse 10 we read this statement, which is something of a theme we follow in these later chapters. Speaking of the tribe of Ephraim, "But they did not drive out the Canaanites..."

Well now we come to verse 3 of chapter 17,

³ However, Zelophehad, the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, had no sons, only daughters; and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah and Noah, Hoglah, Milchah and Tirzah. ⁴ They came near before Eleazar the priest and before Joshua the son of Nun and before the leaders, saying, "The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brothers." So according to the command of the LORD he, (*Joshua*), gave them an inheritance among their father's brothers." Joshua 17: 3-4

Now the inheritance of Manasseh is given, and the cities that are given to them also. In verse 11 you have these cities. But then we read in verse 12, and I'll read on through the end of the chapter,

¹² But the sons of Manasseh could not take possession of these cities, because the Canaanites persisted in living in that land. ¹³ It came about when the sons of Israel became strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely.

¹⁴ Then the sons of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, 'Why have you given me only one lot and one portion for an inheritance, since I am a numerous people whom the LORD has thus far blessed?' ¹⁵ Joshua said to them, "If you are a numerous people, go up to the forest and clear a place for yourself in that land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim, since the hill country of Ephraim is too narrow for you." ¹⁶ The sons of Joseph said, "The hill country is not enough for us, and all the Canaanites who live in the valley land have chariots of iron, both those who are in Bethshean and its towns and those who are in the valley of Jezreel." ¹⁷ Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh,

saying, "You are a numerous people and have great power; you shall not have one lot *only*,¹⁸ but the hill country shall be yours. For though it is a forest, you shall clear it, and to its farthest borders it shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, even though they have chariots of iron *and* though they are strong."

Joshua 17: 12-18

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

Father, it's a great privilege to be together with Your people. That's a statement that I can make every Sunday, and it's true every Sunday. It's a blessing and a privilege to be with Your people, and it's good to have so many of us coming back together at this time. And I pray that that will continue through this very difficult time that we have been in for almost a year now, that You would begin to give us relief, and that You would bring healing upon the land, and that Your people can again meet together and fellowship in person and grow in the faith.

And this is why it is so essential that we be here, that we come together, worship together, study together, hear the Word of God read and then expounded. We need that, Father. And I pray that You would bless us this morning—that You would give us growth, that You would give us nourishment from Your Word. Help us to understand the significance of the events that we will consider this morning and how they apply to us. How difficult the Christian life can be, and the perseverance that we need, and how easy it is to let down. But we can't do that. And yet to not do that, to persevere, we need Your grace, and we need Your mercy and Your help.

So we look to You to bless, and recognize, Father, that that comes through the study of Your Word. And so bless us as we do that this morning. Bless us as we study together. Build us up in the faith and prepare us for the day and the week before us. And bless us materially, physically as well, LORD. We pray that you'd protect so many of our

members who have difficulty, physical impairment. Strengthen them in the LORD. We thank You for the comfort that we have in Christ. And our comfort is that we have a sure hope. It's not in this world. It's in what's to come. And Your Son has opened it up for us through His death.

And Father, we will consider that at the end of this hour, and we will remember Him. And I pray that You would bless us as we do that. So LORD, bless us now as we sing our next hymn, prepare our hearts for the time of study and worship together. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

As you read through the New Testament you notice the frequent references to sports and war. They are common metaphors for the Christian life. Paul spoke of boxing and wrestling and running, as well as fighting with swords and armor, all to illustrate the nature of the Christian life. It's a battle, and it can be exhausting. It can be discouraging.

One of the great stories of college sports is about Bear Bryant's 1954 Texas Aggie football team, and their ten days of practice in Junction, Texas. Now I first learned of that when I was in high school, reading Sports Illustrated. That was probably 11 years after the event, but it was a legend back then. The day they arrived, the team went swimming and they had a ball. The next day the fun ended. It was practice in 100 degree heat, twice a day, in a pasture full of rocks and cactuses, or cacti, without water breaks.

Gene Stalling said, "They went to Junction in two buses and came back home in one." But the 35 players out of the 111 that returned became a champion team. Bear Bryant was tough. I guess a coach who got his nickname for wrestling a bear in a carnival when he was 13 would have a hard time sympathizing with college kids who were tired and sore. That's hard to argue with success, but the best leadership combines encouragement with discipline.

The author of Hebrews inspired and counseled both. Like Paul, he drew from sports, as well. In Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 2, he compared the Christian life to a race, a marathon. It's long and grueling. But then in verse 12 he said, "Strengthen the hands that are weak, and the knees that are feeble." And that command is in the plural. It's to

the church. And his command is to help the weak among them, to strengthen and encourage so that they all finish the course. We're in it together.

Joshua did that. He was a leader who fortified the feeble. And after seven years of war up and down Canaan, the men of Israel were weary of fighting—and maybe they suffered from some combat fatigue. The problem was, they had not finished their mission. And the failure is noted in the statement, "But they did not drive out the Canaanites." And that's in chapter 16 and 17. They owned the land, they conquered Canaan, but they needed to eliminate the pockets of resistance that remained. They wanted to lay down their swords. Joshua wouldn't allow that.

But first they had another task and that was dividing the land among the tribes for their inheritance. That's the subject of this portion of the Book of Joshua, from chapters 13 through 19. Chapter 16 and 17 are about the division for the two tribes of Joseph, the tribe of Ephraim and Manasseh. They received a large portion of the territory in the center of the land, west of the Jordan River.

The amount of land they received indicated the privileged position they had among the tribes. Joseph saved the nation when he was Prime Minister of Egypt. Then Jacob, his father, blessed Joseph's two sons in Genesis 48. Both sons developed separately to become two tribes. But their original unity is recalled here in verse 1, where only one lot was drawn for them. It's called, "...the lot of the sons of Joseph..." They complained about this. It's recorded in chapter 17, verse 14. "The sons of Joseph spoke to Joshua saying, 'Why have you given me only one lot and one portion?'" Both had large tribes. So the two tribal territories were given to them. And while they functioned as two distinct tribes of great importance, they were considered the half-tribes of the tribe of Joseph.

Half of the half-tribe of Manasseh settled east of the Jordan River. I've mentioned this a number of times. But they settled in what is called Trans-Jordan. The other half settled west of the Jordan in Canaan. Their inheritance is described in chapter 17. The tribal territory of Ephraim is given first in chapter 16, in verses 5 through 9. It is the southern-ward, southern of the two tribes. Its boundaries extended just short of the

Jordan River on the east, and to the Mediterranean Sea on the west, with the tribes of Benjamin and Dan as its border on the south, and then the Brook of Kanah on the north. And I think, (it's rather obvious to state this, I've stated it before), but in a study like this it's probably more helpful to simply look at the map in the back of your Bible to see where this is, and the dimensions of it, rather than try to imagine it—its location and size, from the details that are described here in this text. But those details are certainly important, important to them. Each tribe needed to have a specific record of its borders. But what it teaches us also is that God fulfills His Word. He fulfilled His promise to the nation. He promised them an inheritance and here they're having it. They're obtaining this inheritance. And He gave it to each tribe.

Manasseh's inheritance is given in chapter 17 in verses 7 through 11. The Jordan River was its eastern border. The Mediterranean was its western border. Ephraim on the south, and then the Jezreel valley was its border on the north. Together, these tribes occupied what is called "the hill country" in verse 16 of chapter 17. The term 'hill country' is often associated with the tribe of Judah, but the hill country extended from Judah all the way up to the Jezreel valley. So these two tribes controlled the central part of Canaan. It was a large area of land, and it was rich land, particularly the Jezreel Valley is today as well. Today this area is largely the West Bank with lots of Arab villages and mosques. But looking at a map gives you a sense of how large the area was that was allotted to these two tribes, especially when considering that tribe of Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan, in Trans-Jordan. God had given these tribes a large inheritance by His decree and grace. They only needed to finish taking it by driving out the remaining Canaanites. And God would bless their efforts.

But in the middle of all of this, in chapter 17, we read of some daughters of Zelophehad, in verses 3 and 4. They're mentioned here to give a conclusion to a story from Numbers 27, (as I mentioned in the reading of the text), verses 1 through 11. And I think they're mentioned here for another reason, in light of the things that we've just said. But here they're mentioned. And they're mentioned here because normally, as I

said, the inheritance would pass from a person to his descendants through the first born son.

But Zelophehad had no sons. He had only daughters. He had five of them. So they went to Moses years back with this problem of who would be the heir of their father's inheritance since he had no son. So Moses considered their problem, and he declared that they, the daughters, and others like them in a similar situation, would receive the inheritance. He put certain requirements on them in terms of marriage.—They must marry within their tribe. But they would receive the inheritance.

Well that was some seven years earlier, and now they've come to Joshua and to Eleazar the priest, to remind them of the promise that Moses gave, and how he had ruled in their favor. And now they're seeking to have what is theirs. And we read in verse 4, "They came near before Eleazar the priest and before Joshua the son of Nun and before the leaders, saying, 'The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brothers.' " They remind these two men of that, and so the result is, "according to the command of the LORD, he gave them an inheritance among their father's brothers." Well, why is this included?

Well, I think it's included here for a number of reasons. You have these sort of, these interesting conversations that take place throughout the division of the land. And first of all, it's to show that God's Word was fulfilled. He gives the rest of the story from Numbers 27 here to show that God's faithful to His Word. And these daughters received the inheritance that was promised.

But in addition to that, it shows the value these five daughters placed on their inheritance. They were eager to get it. And you see that in contrast to these tribes who failed to secure their inheritance. Again, God had richly blessed the tribes—all of them—but especially the tribes we're considering here, the tribes of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. Yet both of those tribes failed to claim all that He had given to them. In verse 10 of chapter 16, "But they did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites live in midst of Ephraim to this day, and they became forced laborers."

The city of Gezer didn't become Israel's possession, it didn't come under their control until Solomon. And the reason Solomon obtained it is because the Pharaoh of Egypt came up and conquered that town and killed all the Canaanites. You find this in 1 Kings 9, verse 16. And then he gave that city to Solomon as a dowry when he married the daughter of Pharaoh, (which never should have happened). But why so long had that city remained outside of the control of the sons of Israel and the Ephraimites? Well, it shows the failure.

And we see the same thing with Manasseh. Its failure is described in the same way. In verse 11 of chapter 17 there's a list of cities that Manasseh had inherited. And then in verse 12 and 13, we read, "But the sons of Manasseh could not take possession of these cities, because the Canaanites persisted in living in that land. It came about when the sons of Israel became strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely."

This is very similar to what we read earlier in chapter 15 of the tribe of Judah, (we considered that last week), and they failed to capture Jerusalem. And that's how chapter 15 ends, verse 63, "As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the sons of Judah could not drive them out; so the Jebusites live with the sons of Judah at Jerusalem until this day." Three tribes in three chapters, the strongest tribes failed in their mission. And the implication, as I suggested last week, is, failure was due to sloth rather than Canaanite strength.

The women of this book are set in stark contrast to the men, these five daughters from Manasseh, and earlier, Achsah, Caleb's daughter, who boldly got her inheritance. On the one hand it shows, considering these women, it shows the elevated respect for women in Israelite society, compared to most societies that regarded women as more property than anything else. But more than that, I think more to the context, what this shows is they valued the inheritance, while the men, the warriors, were growing weary.

But while they were growing weary, these women weren't. If they could have put on armor and fought the Canaanites for what was rightly theirs, they would have done that. They gave an example of what is to be done. The men of Judah needed that, and

they lacked persistence, they lacked perseverance. So did the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. They settled for a kind of peaceful coexistence with the enemy. And it was disobedience.

Earlier Moses had given them instruction, in Deuteronomy 20, verses 16 through 18, where he stated clearly what they were to do. They were to destroy the Canaanites. "...you shall not leave alive anything that breathes." (vs16). I know that that seems harsh. We've considered that in the past. But this command, you need to remember, was unique to the Canaanites. It was judgment on their unbelief, it was judgment on their cruel pagan culture, and it was protective as well. Because, were they to be tolerated, were they to be allowed to live among the Israelites, they would infect them with their paganism. That's why they could not tolerate them. And that's, you know the history, is what happened.

Now what this is, is an outworking of is the patience of God. The patience of God had endured this pagan, Canaanite culture for 500 years or more. And now that patience of God was at an end. They were to be judged. Israel was to do that, but Israel failed.

And they disobeyed God for two reasons. First, weariness, as I've suggested, battle fatigue. And secondly, materialism. Verse 13 of chapter 17 states, "...they put the Canaanites to forced labor..." They chose not to destroy them, but instead use them as cheap labor for their own financial gain. And they did this, according to verse 13, when Israel was strong, when Israel had the power and the advantage.

Now they rolled over them to begin with, when they conquered the land. They rolled over all of the Canaanite armies when the Canaanite armies were strong, which shows that God was with them and faithful to them, and He was far more powerful than their enemies. But the Canaanites, in the providence of God, persisted. They fought hard, they wouldn't give up—so the Israelites did. Seven years of war had worn on them. They were tired of the fight, and they made peace with the enemy.

Francis Schaeffer wrote a brief commentary on the Book of Joshua some 50 plus years ago. He called these tribes "Practical Materialists", who for the sake of ease and money didn't obey the LORD. And he made the application to the church, which is how

we should take this. This is how we should understand it. It's history, but we learn from history. And this has application to us. And so he made that application. He wrote, "We Christians stand in the same danger. It is all too easy to fail to possess the possessions God has promised, because we either draw back in fear, or we become caught up in the affluent society."

Well, there are consequences to what we do, consequences to what they did, so Israel needed to continue the fight. But they didn't want to do that. And we learn something about their problem in verses 14 through 18 of the 17th chapter. They approached Joshua with a complaint. They were large tribes, and they considered their portion of Canaan—they considered their inheritance to be small and they thought they needed more room. And so Joshua took them at their word and gave them some advice. He told them to clear out the land if they wanted more space. Verse 15, "Joshua said to them, 'If you are a numerous people, go up to the forest and clear a place for yourself there in the land of the Perizzite and the Rephaim.'

Now the Rephaim were fearsome giants, so he's saying, 'Go fight those giants and clear the land, since the hill country of Ephraim is too narrow for you.' In other words, they had room. They had plenty of space, God didn't leave them less than they needed. They had all that they needed. They just needed to get to work clearing it and cultivating it and conquering it. —Go after those giants!

Now this gives us an interesting fact about Israel. At this time, the time of Joshua, it was heavily wooded. In the Book of Daniel, Israel is referred to as "the beautiful land". It had forests as well as pastures. But you wouldn't know that if you'd just seen pictures of the Holy land of Israel from 100 years ago, or even less than that. It was barren. There were lots of rocky hills. That's the image a lot of people have of what it was like. Well that is due to a long history of wars being fought there.

The Indians, the American Indians, refer to a section in northern New York state as 'the war path', because they had fought lots of battles there. And then the British and the Americans fought battles there in that part of New York. Well this was the warpath of the ancient world. The Egyptians would come up through Canaan and Israel, and the

Assyrians and the Babylonians would come down. And this is the path through which they would travel to fight one another. And so that's one of the reasons for that condition. But also just the fact that there was over grazing of the land for centuries, it was not taken care of, it became defoliated and eroded.

And that's now changing. The modern state of Israel is reforesting the land. And for many decades they've been doing that. I read a figure where they have planted something like over 260 million trees. And I supposed now it's closer to 300 million trees, reclaiming the rocky countryside, even down into the semi-arid Negev. They've transformed that country.

Well that's the way it was in Joshua's day, a land of forests. He didn't dispute the idea that they were cramped for space. But his answer wasn't the answer that they wanted to hear. He said, in effect, if you want more land because you're so numerous, then go to work. Use your great numbers to cut down trees and clear space. And in doing that he turned their complaint against them, and indirectly, and maybe not so subtly, rebuked their inaction. 'You've recognized the problem, now go fix it.'

That's a lesson for us. And I think very much it explains the way this church functions. Oftentimes people will recognize a problem and they'll bring the problem to the attention of the elders or maybe some of the teachers; and it may be a genuine problem. But the answer that we often give is, "Then take care of it." Or people will just do that. And I've seen a lot of that. They'll recognize, "There needs to be a teacher here", and they're glad to do that. Or they see how there needs to be help given in a certain area, and they're willing to help.

It was pointed out to me not that long ago that there is a lot of ministry that goes on in this church under the radar, so to speak. And it isn't seen by most people, that you're not maybe all that aware of it. But there are people doing all kinds of things to help one another. Maybe it's calling people up, particularly in this time of the pandemic. To go back to Mark's lesson, one way people help, and one way we can all help is to be men and women of prayer, and constantly involved in that. There's a lot of work that

goes on unseen, and that's what we need to see. And that should be an encouragement to you. Encouragement isn't coddling, and it isn't indulging. It is recognizing a problem and then giving the right advice.

And that's what Joshua was doing here. He recognized the problem here was not that they didn't have enough land. The problem was they didn't have the will and the resolve to go claim the land that they had. And so Joshua challenged them. And men of Joseph responded, but they didn't respond the way they should have responded. They were still not moved to action. In verse 16 they basically repeat the complaint that they had made, saying that, 'The hill country was not enough for them.'

But then they added that they couldn't move into the valley because the Canaanites had a cavalry, and it was formidable. It was mechanized. "...all the Canaanites who live in the valley land have chariots of iron..." Now they didn't want to go up into the hills to conquer and clear it. That's where the giants were. And they didn't want to go down into the valley to fight horses and chariots.

What they were really saying is, 'They didn't want to fight anymore.' And look, seven years of war is a long time to fight. Remember, these are people who were born in the desert. They lived traveling from place to place like nomads. They lived in tents. Now they've come to the promised land and they fought for seven years, at least. They have cities and they have houses, but they can't obtain them until they finished the battle. And they're ready to stop fighting—they're ready to go to their houses and farm their lands. I can only imagine how it can wear down a person and a person's resolve when the fight keeps going on and on.

Nevertheless, that was the mission before them, and they had not yet completed the mission. They'd not yet completed the mission, but God was still there. God was not absent. So Joshua responded to their objection, but didn't do so as he might have responded. He might have tried to shame them into action; that's the way some people seek to lead others. He might have said, "Sit down here for a moment. Let me tell you about five sisters that came to me. I talked to them and they were eager, eager to have their inheritance. And they'd be out there fighting for it if they could. Why aren't you?"

Or he might have said, "Have you heard about Caleb and the giants that he drove out of Hebron?"

He didn't do that, instead he encouraged them. He reminded them of their strength, he reminded them that their strength is God given, God is with them—and he stated their confidence in them to fight. The chapter ends, verses 17 and 18, "Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh, saying, 'You are a numerous people and have great power; you shall not have one lot *only*, but the hill country shall be yours. For though it is a forest, you shall clear it, and to its farthest border it shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, even though they have chariots of iron *and* though they are strong.'

And if he had had access to Psalm 20, he could have quoted verse 7, "Some *boast* in chariots and some in horses, But we will boast in the name of the LORD..." Joshua didn't need that. That's basically what he's saying to them. He didn't have that Psalm, but he didn't need it, because he had recent history that basically said the same thing—and which probably was what inspired David when he wrote his Psalm. Because Joshua's army had recently defeated the northern Canaanites, which was a vast army, and they had chariots, which the Israelites didn't—nevertheless they defeated them. So Joshua could tell them with firm confidence, "...you shall drive out the Canaanites, even though they have chariots of iron..." They'd done it before. And they'd done it before because the LORD was with them.

But part of the problem, I think really the root of the problem, was they'd forgotten the LORD. They'd forgotten His promises to them, and instead they were thinking about what seemed to them to be just an endless war. It's a problem a runner has, I suppose, in a race, and he gets tired, a marathon. It's a long race, and he gets to the point where this is a grind, and takes his eyes off, perhaps, the finish line. And the temptation is to stop.

Knowing that, the author of Hebrews chose that as the metaphor for the Christian life, which is also long. It doesn't end this side of heaven. We're always in the battle. We're always in the fight. So spiritually our arms get weak and our legs get feeble.

The only way to run it, or live it, is the way the author of Hebrews says at the beginning of that passage in chapter 12, in verse 2. He says, by "... fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith..." We must always have Christ before us in our thought if we are to run the race well, if we're to fight the battle with perseverance.

Now what does that mean, to have Christ before us? It means understanding who He is and what He's done. That's the strongest motivation in the Christian life. Paul spoke of it in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 14. He wrote, "For the love of Christ controls us...", (or, "the love of Christ constrains us"), "...having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;" Christ's death, His sacrifice, saves! Paul could think of that and think, "I am saved, and I am what I am by His grace and His great sacrifice for me." And knowing that the apostle said, "controlled" or "constrained" his behavior, it constrained his thinking, his thoughts, and his actions. Christ's love for him—that He would die and save such a person as unworthy as the apostle Paul himself.

So he lived his life for Christ. Not out of a sense of duty, though there is duty to the Christian life, and Paul knew that he had a sense of duty to serve the LORD, to be obedient. But that's not what drove him. What drove him was gratitude, thankfulness. And the more we understand Christ and His love for us, what He left for us, and what He did to save us—the more we understand that, the more we will gladly sacrifice for Him. And do so confidently and do so by faith, knowing that the One who saved us is LORD over all. He is LORD over time and space. We are absolutely secure in Him. He will never desert us, He will never fail us and we will triumph as we serve Him.

You see that in Paul's life, you see that in the lives of the other apostles, but you see that attitude and that ambition for the LORD in other people's lives, too, out of church history. I think of various people, but one that came to mind was C. T. Studd, who was a missionary to China, and then a missionary to the Congo. He was a remarkable man. He was born into wealth and privilege in England, and he enjoyed national fame as a cricket player at Cambridge. But he left all of that in order to preach the Gospel in foreign lands, where he spent his life in very hard circumstances.

Well, he wrote some memorable lines. One of them is one you're probably familiar with, "Only one life twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." And another one was, "Some want to live within the sound of church bell or chapel bells. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

Now that was Joshua and Caleb, men who fought the LORD's war to the end. It was not so much the men of Joseph. They weren't getting within a yard of hell. They were weary of war. They were weak. Joshua tried to strengthen them, but some people will just not be encouraged. They will not receive wise counsel when it's given. And many in Israel at that time were like that. They were weary. And so they made peace with the enemy. Whatever the immediate benefits of doing that, it was short lived. And you know that if you read on in the Bible through the Book of Judges, because there we read that the enemy that they tolerated and turned into their servants, a next generation got the upper hand and made slaves of them.

So there are lessons in all of this for us. And first is a warning against the danger of relaxing in the fight of faith, slowing down in the race, and then stopping— and compromising with the world. The church is always under pressure to do that, to conform to the world, and do things the way the world does them—in order to make some more effective appeal to people, Christians and non-Christians alike.

There's nothing wrong with being appealing, nothing wrong with having a message be clear and presented well. There's nothing wrong with growing as a church. We want to grow. All of that's good in and of itself, unless it is done at the cost of the truth, or the cost of obedience to the LORD. The strength of the church is the Word of God. The strength of the church is the Scriptures, and that is the center of the ministry— preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God, from beginning to end. And that's always threatened. It's been threatened from the very beginning of the church's history.

The Church has always been tempted to trim its sails to the wind, go to the easiest direction, modify its message a little. Especially, I think that's true now, in an age when a radical and hostile morality is roiling society. It's easier to adapt than stand fast in the Scriptures.

Well, it was that way in Paul's day. Paul urged Timothy, some of the last things that he wrote, the last counsel that he gave in 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 2, "... preach the word; be ready in season and out of season...reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction." 'Preach the word with instruction'. Make the right applications—but preach the Word. That's what the church must do.

And so, as a church, we can't compromise in that sense, but individually, each of us face challenges daily. We're tempted to, in some way or another, in a very subtle way, conform to the world. It's the problem of worldliness. It's the problem of materialism, being guided more by our appetites and our interests than we are by Scripture and by thoughts of eternity, seeking to live for eternity. Instead of that we become time servers, living for the moment, and not investing our lives in what lasts.

But the pressure to do that is great, I think it's subtle and it's great, so that it's a struggle that we're in. And it's a lifelong struggle. It never ends. We all feel it. Now some of us, I think as difficult as life can be, I think of the people to whom the Hebrews, to whom the author of Hebrews wrote, they had gone through a long period of protracted struggle. Some of them had been imprisoned. Others had lost property. They had lost everything in their faithfulness to the LORD, and they were beginning to flag in their faith. And so the author of Hebrews writes this great book of exhortation to encourage them on.

But we all face difficulties of one kind or another. We are all in this race that can wear upon us, and we get tired, even defeated and discouraged—like those sons of Joseph. And we're ready to make peace with the enemy and end the fight.

We need to be encouraging one another—not to conform. We need, as the author of Hebrews instructed those Jewish believers to whom he wrote to, "...strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble..." (Heb 12:12).

George Müller gave us some of the kind of encouragement that we need when he said, "To learn strong faith is to endure great trials." Now that may not be what we want to hear but that is the kind of encouragement that we need. Because what he's saying is, 'If you want strong faith, endure, persevere, and your faith will be

strengthened.' And then he added, "I have learned my faith by standing firm amid strong testing." So he gives this instruction, and then he says, "I've done it. I've experienced it, and you will, too."

We don't need—in order to help one another grow—we don't need to be scolding one another. We need to be encouraging each other. It's part of Christian fellowship. It's coming alongside and helping each other in the long race of faith. Now you can't help, I can't help, but admire and be impressed with those 35 ball players that came home from Junction. They were tough. But wouldn't it have been much better if 111 had returned fit and ready for the season? That's our goal, for all of us to cross the finish line. We will do that by God's grace. He will not lose one of us. It's up to Him, ultimately, not us.

The believer will persevere to the end; John chapter 10 verse 28; Philippians 1 verse 6, and many others make that very clear. But, we want to persevere triumphantly, and enter into heaven and hear those words of Christ, "Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your master." And so Joshua's message to us is, 'fight the good fight of faith, and strengthen the feeble.' That's the message for the believer in Jesus Christ.

But if you're here without Him, if you've not believed in Him, then the message is very simple. —Believe! Trust in Christ. Know that you are lost, and you will soon enter eternity lost forever. The Son of God came into the world to seek and save the lost. So be found by Him. Believe in Him and be saved, forgiven, and given eternal life. And then take up the sword of the spirit and fight the good fight for Him and for one another. May God help us to do that.

Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for the example that we have in these tribes, an example of the negative. But it's a warning to us that we are in a long race, we're in a protracted conflict. It goes on throughout this life. It won't end in this life and we can get

discouraged. But as Joshua told them at the very end, 'They will conquer as they act in faith, as they go forward.' God had given them victory. He'd give them victory more as they went forward. And we need to do that, too, Father. We need to fix our eyes on Jesus. We need to think on Him and have Him before our minds and reflect on who He is and what He's done for us. Help us to do that.

Help us to do that now, as we turn our attention to the LORD's Supper. And we might reflect deeply upon His person work for us, and what that means for us, how we should respond. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)