

“Spiritual Extrapolation”
 Sermon for 28 June 2015
 Joshua 23:14-16; Deut. 4:5-8

14 “And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things [“words” as in verse 15 twice] that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed. 15 But just as all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the Lord your God has given you, 16 if you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you.”

Joshua 23, ESV

“In mathematics, extrapolation is the process of estimating, beyond the original observation range, the value of a variable on the basis of its relationship with another variable.” I was drawn to this concept as I meditated on Joshua’s words, his parting words of wisdom for the next generation of leaders. Probably the most familiar passage from Joshua is not what I’ve cited. Rather it is his ringing challenge, “Choose this day whom you will serve . . . as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (24:15) But his challenge is actually rooted in the moment.

I am dying. You folks know in your hearts and souls (that is, “you both feel and know”, or “you have by experience and understanding”) that God has kept all His promises to us. He is promised and performed. So this He with Whom we have much to do. His purposes, His mission for us is to be defining. . . not our own wishes, lies and dreams. God has ambitions for us and, if we are true servants, His ambitions overrule us, overrule our ambitions, and direct our steps and our choices. Joshua actually said, **not one word of all the words (good things, blessings, promises of God) has failed to materialize!** One huge, compelling reason to know the Word is tied to this: if we do not know, or remember plainly, what God has spoken, we cannot know what He is going to do! We will not know what He is willing to do, or whether it is conditional, or unconditional. We can be ignorant and when we do neglect the Word; we choose our ignorance as a consequence. God is faithful, and every man proved a liar who declares this is not so.

Joshua was adamant that God keeps His word, performs His promises. Therefore, both blessings and cursing’s are inescapable. God does not struggle to keep His word, we, by contrast, do. How would Joshua know this? How could he know this apart from meditating on Word of God as transmitted to him in oral and written form? **Not one word has failed.** This is a powerful testimony. But it is a testimony that only those who have performed their duty to God can lay claim to. The events have proven the veracity of Scripture, demonstrated its truth. God did indeed led them out of Egypt with wonders and signs, and His powerful outstretched arm. He did keep them through the wilderness wanderings to which unbelief, fear and rebellion consigned them. He did turn back their enemies on every hand, subduing kings and demolishing cities in expulsion of wicked pagan peoples. The promise made to Abraham had been accomplished, albeit four hundred years later but exactly on time, in time.

When we fail to draw this truth (**not a single promise has fallen short**) out, when we neglect our duty and do not inhabit our history, spiritual, personal and biblical histories (for they are all intertwined!), *it is as if we had none*. To such people life appears purposeless, chaotic and chance rules. God is perceived, by this neglect, as distant, impersonal and indifferent—in a word, pointless or irrelevant. Neglect produces ignorance of the Word, ignorance creates a spiritual vacuum which, in the nature of things abhorred, is rapidly filled with all manner of demonic troublers and human reason and foolishness. The folly that bedevils us is the unhappy fruit of our lack of diligence and our neglect of the Word. This is what we are up against.

John Flavel wrote: “No rules of moral prudence, no natural remedies can perform for us that which the Word can do. And is not this a sealed truth attested by a thousand undeniable experiences experiences? From the source (the Word) the saints have fetched their cordials when fainting under the rod. One word of God can do more than ten thousand words of men to relieve a distressed soul. If Providence has at any time directed you to such promises as either assure you that the Lord will be with you in trouble (Ps. 91:15 **When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.**), or that encourage you from inward peace to bear cheerfully outward burdens (John 16:33 **I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.**), or satisfy you of God’s tenderness and moderation in His dealings with you (Isa. 27:8 **Measure by measure, by exile you contended with them; he removed them with his fierce breath in the day of the east wind.**), or that you shall reap blessed fruit from them (Romans 8:28 **And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**) or that make clear your interest in God and His love under your afflictions (2 Samuel 7:14 **I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men.**) O what ease and relief ensues and how light is your burden compared with what it was before.

The Mystery of Providence, p.127

So, we continue in Deut. 4:5-8: **See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the Lord my God has commanded me that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.** v.6 **Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, :’Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’** v.7 **For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?** v.8 **And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law what I set before you today?** These words, spoken by Moses in the hearing of Joshua, no doubt, were among those that Moses imparted as he approached the end of his own life.

Remembering God is a critical piece of our Christian identity. Remembering His promises is crucial as well. Jesus wants to be remembered: for who He is and for what He has done. While alive He was always talking about His fulfillment of God’s promises, His mission and reason for being here: **I have food you know not of . . . to do My Father’s will sustains and satisfies Me.** Jesus harkened back to Deut. 8:2-3: **And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.** 3. **And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know(!) nor did your fathers know that you might know man does not live by bread alone but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God.** Jesus was extrapolating, drawing from what God has done (promised and provided/both spoken and performed) to the present circumstance. This

every Christian also must do. This is the obedient life, a faithful life. We are promising people because we serve a promising God!

Jesus wants to be remembered. Each time we come to the Lord's Table, we repeated twice, **Do this in remembrance of Me**. I have reminded you that the force of this request is something like: "Do this, lest you forget who I am . . . lest you forget what I have done for you." Why? Very simply put, when we forget who He is, we lose track of who we are . . . we derive our identity (our fullest significance and meaning from His significance and meaning!). God will not appear near and real to our children if He does not appear near and real to us! Recite to each other your agreement with Joshua's bold conclusion . Imbibe openly, freely and frequently in the food that fed Jesus.

Those who follow us need to know our faith is about life, true life and enduring life and not just about religion. This is where we come in. This is the testimony that overcomes the world! If we do not make this a living testimony, it should not surprise us that they drift from the moorings of the Word and memory.

Amen