



Text: Joshua 23:1-16<sup>1</sup>  
Series: Facing Life with Courage  
Title: Part 11 – “Whatever you do, don’t let go!”  
Date: September 27, 2009  
Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Justin McBride is a country singer and songwriter who was until very recently also a champion professional bull rider. In one of his songs he describes his experience of being strapped onto a bull in the shoot just before a ride. The man who is wrapping his hand to the harness of the bull is an old friend who McBride refers to as “J.W.” The chorus of the song brings us to the place where the gate is about to open and McBride and the bull are about to engage in battle and just at that moment, “J.W.” leans over and says to McBride...

**“Whatever you do don’t let go,  
It’s time to be a cowboy, don’t you know  
If you get through this you got it whipped  
But till you hear the whistle blow  
Whatever you do, don’t let go.”**

<http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/mcbride-justin/dont-let-go-23845.html>

That’s pretty good advice for a bull rider and its pretty good advice for the life of faith, too. The essence of “J.W.s” advice matches what Joshua said to the people of Israel. Joshua was coming to the end of his life. He knew he didn’t have long to live, so he gathered the leaders of the nation together for a farewell message. The heart of what he said to them is found in verse 8...

**“you shall cling to the Lord your God just as you have done to this day.”  
Joshua 23:8**

The NIV and several other Bible translations render the expression as...

**“hold fast to the Lord your God”**

Hold on to Him! Hold fast to Him! Cling to Him! Don’t let go of Him! Whatever you do, don’t let go of Him!

The word “cling” paints a profound picture of intimacy coupled with tenacity. The word is used in that beautiful description of the intimacy of marriage what we find in **Genesis 2, verse 24** where it tells us that a husband is to leave his father and mother and **“hold fast” to his wife** and the two shall become one flesh. On the tenacious side, the prophet Isaiah used the word to describe the strength of the

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Lord's relationship with his people Israel. Isaiah used the picture of a metal smith joining two pieces of metal.

**“The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, “It is good”; and they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved.” Isaiah 41:7**

Isaiah's "soldering" is the same word we have in Joshua translated as "cling" or "hold fast." Do you see the mixture of intimacy and strength in "cling"?

Clinging to the Lord involves two key aspects. **First...**

### **Clinging to the Lord requires a strong obedience to God's Word**

Joshua challenged the leaders of Israel to...

**“be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left...”  
Joshua 23:6**

God's Word was to be studied, understood and obeyed scrupulously. They were to take hold with a strong grip on God's Word and cling to it tenaciously.

And **second,**

### **Clinging to the Lord requires an intimate commitment to love God**

Joshua directed the leaders of Israel to...

**“Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God.” Joshua 23:11**

Being "very careful" to love God requires that we take loving God seriously. It requires a deep and steady commitment to God. It isn't something that comes when we "feel" like it. It's a love that "holds fast" to the Lord.

Let me remind us of the importance of a faith that clings to and holds fast to the Lord. True saving faith isn't a momentary believing. True saving faith is a lifelong clinging, trusting and holding faith. Listen to these Scriptures.

Jesus told a parable about seed and various types of soil. The seed represented the Gospel message. The various soils represented the way people responded to the Gospel. Most of the seed that was sown failed, but one seed lasted and produced a crop. That, Jesus said, was the seed that fell in the good soil and he said...



**“As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.” Luke 8:15**

Paul reminded the believers in Corinth of the Gospel they had believed and to which they held...

**“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.” 1 Corinthians 15:1-2**

And Paul wrote to the Philippians believers about living the Christian life with a view to the day we would stand before God. He wrote...

**“Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.” Philippians 2:14-16**

“Holding fast to the word of life” is something that marks the lives of the children of God from the day we begin our faith relationship with God until the day we stand before him.

And concerning that day, the day when Jesus comes to take his church home, Jesus said to the believers in the church in Philadelphia...

**“I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.” Revelation 3:11**

Brothers and sisters, hear me clearly. The Bible knows of no other kind of true faith other than a faith that holds fast to the end. The Bible knows of no other true faith other than a faith that clings to the Lord. True faith isn't just a moment of insight into spiritual truth. True faith is a life of faith. It begins in a moment of insight, but then true faith goes on to lead us deeper into God's truth and into an increasing transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ leading us forward until the day we see Jesus. That day could be the day of our death or it could be the day we hear the trumpet call announcing his return. Either way...

**“till you hear the whistle blow  
Whatever you do, don't let go.”**

Joshua calls Israel to a life of relentless, tenacious faith in the Lord. He knows that it's a hard call to give and so he provides the leaders of Israel with both strong positive and strong negative motivation.



First of all he encourages God's people to...

**Cling to the Lord because of all that He has done for you!**

This is the positive side of motivation and he provides some strong encouragement for Israel to be faithful to the Lord. He said to the leaders of Israel...

**“you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the Lord your God who has fought for you.” Joshua 23:3**

And he repeats the theme a bit later because it's so important to remember.

**“For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.” Joshua 23:9-10**

God had brought them into the land of promise and he kept his promise to fight for them. When they obeyed him, their enemies fled from them; when they didn't obey, they died in battle. But Israel had learned its lesson and had returned to the Lord and year after year the battles had been won until they came to the day when the war was essentially over.

Joshua wanted to drive this truth home into their hearts and minds because it is so easy to forget what God has done for us. It's so easy to fall into the “what-have-you-done-for-me-lately” grumbles. This week as I researched this passage I came across a sermon on this passage. What the pastor wrote brought tears of thanksgiving to my eyes for what God has done for me and so I want to pass along his words to you. His name is Pastor Mark Schaeufele and he pastors a church in Ohio. He wrote...

*All too frequently, we forget who we are - sinners saved by grace. Not one of us will stand on the streets of heaven and say "I am here because I deserve it." Not one of us can say I am good enough to meet God's holy standards. Not one of us can stand before a righteous and holy God except by the blood of Jesus.*

*We forget all that God has done for us. He has forgiven us. He has saved us. He has filled us with His Spirit. He has healed us.*

*We forget from where we have come. Paul wrote...*

**“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the**



**desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved....”  
Ephesians 2:1-5**

*Once we were enemies of God, but now He calls us friends. Once we had no hope, but now we have the hope of eternal life. We need to stop focusing on what we don't have, and start focusing on what we do have.*

[http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributor\\_profile.asp?ContributorID=3464&msg=9](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=3464&msg=9)

Pastor Schaeufele quoted a song by the group, Casting Crowns, which many of you might know. The song is called “Who Am I” and the words went straight to my heart...

**Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth  
Would care to know my name  
Would care to feel my hurt  
Who am I, that the Bright and Morning Star  
Would choose to light the way  
For my ever wandering heart**

**Who am I, that the eyes that see my sin  
Would look on me with love and watch me rise again  
Who am I, that the voice that calmed the sea  
Would call out through the rain  
And calm the storm in me**

**I am a flower quickly fading  
Here today and gone tomorrow  
A wave tossed in the ocean  
A vapor in the wind  
Still You hear me when I'm calling  
Lord, You catch me when I'm falling  
And You've told me who I am  
I am Yours, I am Yours**

**Not because of who I am  
But because of what You've done  
Not because of what I've done  
But because of who You are**

**I am Yours  
Whom shall I fear  
Whom shall I fear  
... I am Yours**



## I am Yours

<http://www.elyrics.net/read/c/casting-crowns-lyrics/who-am-i-lyrics.html>

We need to remember that God has done for us and cling to him! We need to remember who we are and cling to him even harder! O how we need him! How desperately we need him. The word “cling” barely describes the desperation in our grip. We’re like drowning people holding on for dear life.

Sometimes we forget what God has done for us because we’re so selfish and self-centered. But sometimes we forget what God has done for us in the past because there always seem to be new battles to be fought and the challenges of today overwhelm us. Although the major battles to take the land had been fought and won, Joshua reminded Israel’s leaders that there were still pockets of resistance that would take years, in fact, centuries, to remove. There were still battles to be fought and Joshua encouraged the leaders to remember what God had done so that they would trust him to be with them in the future. Referring to these future battles, Joshua said to them...

**“The Lord your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the Lord your God promised you.” Joshua 23:5**

In other words, Joshua encourages God’s people to...

**Cling to the Lord because of all that He will do for you!**

And he encourages them to trust God to keep his promises in the future because he has kept them in the past. And that, my friends, is an act of faith. Believing that God will be faithful today and tomorrow just as he’s been faithful in the past is an act of faith.

Four times in his message to the leaders of Israel Joshua reiterated the truth that God had kept his promises. The Lord had fought for Israel, “just as he promised...” (v.11). Israel would take full possession of the land of Promise, “just as” he promised them (v.5). All the good things that God had promised them had come to pass (v.15). In fact, Joshua was emphatic about God’s promise keeping:

**“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 that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed.” Joshua 23:14**

The writer of the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews encourages us to have the same future-faith perspective. He wrote...



**“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” Hebrews 10:23**

God will never leave us, forsake us or abandon us (Heb 13:5) – he promised!  
God will supply all our needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus (Php 4:19) – he promised!

God will provide his grace to enable us to handle whatever situation we face (2 Cor 9:8; 12:9) – he promised!

And one day, Jesus will come himself to bring us safely home (John 14:1ff) – he promised! You can trust him to keep his promises because he is faithful.

Cling to him because of what he has done for you. Cling to him because of what he will do for you. And...

**Cling to the Lord or face the painful prospect of His discipline!**

Joshua balances the encouragement of God’s promises with the warnings of God’s discipline.

**“For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the Lord your God has given you.” Joshua 23:12-13**

We’ve already touched several times in our study in Joshua on the issue of intermarriage between the people of Israel and the nations around them. God’s prohibition on intermarriage wasn’t for social or political reasons. Wherever a person would submit to the Lord, marriage was permitted, even blessed by the Lord. The story of Rahab, a story we encountered earlier in our study of Joshua (chapter 2 & 6), is an example of a pagan who became a follower of the Lord, intermarried with Israel and was blessed by God. She had a son who was named Boaz, one of the truly great men of Scripture, who also married a foreign woman, a wonderful woman by the name of Ruth. Rahab, by intermarriage with Israel, came to an ancestor of both King David and Jesus Christ.

But wherever intermarriage involved unconverted pagans it had the tendency to lead God’s people away from the Lord. In his later years, King Solomon fell into this trap. The history of the kings tells us...

**“Now King Solomon loved many foreign women ... from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” [See Exodus 34:16] Solomon clung to these in love. ... And his wives turned away his heart. For when**



**Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God....” 1 Kings 11:1-4**

Joshua warned Israel that if they chose to cling to other gods, God would discipline his people. Just as God had fulfilled his promise regarding “the good things”...

**“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, 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.” Joshua 23:15-16**

I want to point out something very important in this text. The phrase translated as “the evil things” is literally “the evil words.” The phrase translated as “the good things” is similarly “the good words.” What Joshua is referring to are the promises that God made in Deuteronomy which are called the “blessings” and the “curses.” The good words are God’s promises of blessing. The evil words are his curses for disobedience. Here is the essence of God’s “good words” to Israel...

**“if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today ... he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” Deuteronomy 28:1, 8**

But God also warned his people with “evil words”...

**“if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today ... [the] LORD will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly ... And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.” Deuteronomy 28:15, 20, 63**

God’s promise of the Land of Promise was a promise that was conditional on Israel’s obedience to him. Obedience brought the blessing of God’s care and the blessing of the land. Disobedience brought the curse of the withdrawal of God’s care and the curse of removal from the land.

Many believers read these passages and make a mistaken application of them to their relationship with God. They reason: “if God would cast out his people Israel from the land for disobedience to his Law, then God will cast me out of his family if I’m disobedient to his will.” This logic is seriously flawed for two reasons.

First of all, even though the Lord eventually took Israel out of the land and sent them into exile in Babylon because of their sin, they never stopped being God’s chosen people! While they sat by the rivers of Babylon, weeping as they sang



the songs of Zion, they were still his people! (See Psalm 137) God did not cast them away. In fact, his plan, even before he removed them from the land, was to bring them back home.

Secondly, we need to understand that the curses of the Law are no longer directly applicable to those who believe in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul lifts the burden of this fear from our hearts when he tells us that...

**“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” Galatians 3:13-14**

The curse of the Law no longer hangs over our heads. God’s blessing has been poured out on believers through the Holy Spirit who has been placed within us as...

**“the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it...”  
Ephesians 1:14**

The Father does not cast his children out of his family! But please know that our Father in heaven loves us too much to allow disobedience to go without discipline.

**“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. ... he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Hebrews 12:6, 10-11**

Our Father will work to break our grip on anything that competes with his desire that we cling to him in faith, not because he desires to punish us, but because he wants us to share in his holiness. Sometimes that discipline is the nagging, restlessness we experience in our spirit caused by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit who will give us no peace until we deal with the sin to which we cling. (Eph 4:30) Sometimes, especially in the case of public sin, that discipline could mean our exclusion from the gathering of God’s people until we let go of the sin to which we hold fast. (1 Corinthians 5:1ff) And sadly, the Bible even points to premature death as one of the ways that God disciplines believers who cling to sin that brings the Gospel into contempt. (Acts 5:1ff; 1 Corinthians 11:30-32) But the goal of God’s discipline is not to destroy us but to break our grip on sin and bring us again to cling to the Lord.

We cling to the Lord because...

- Of all that he has done for us!



- Of all that he wants to do for us!
- The alternative involves painful discipline.

There is something imbedded in the text that I want you to notice. Even in his warning of God's impending judgment, Joshua emphasizes the "good" that God desires for Israel. Joshua refers three times to the land as "good" (v.13, 15, 16) and twice to God's "good" words (v.14, 15). Only once does he refer to the "evil" words of the curse (v.15). That's because God's way is the good way and he wants us to follow it because it is good. And even though they're contained within a warning, Joshua's last words to the leaders are about...

**"...the good land that [the Lord] has given you." Joshua 23:16**

There's a New Testament principle of motivation in making the last word God's "good" word. Paul tells us that...

**"God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" Romans 2:4**

The word "kindness" here can also be translated as "goodness." And so this morning I want to end by encouraging us to cling to the Lord because he is the good Lord who desires to pour his goodness into our lives.

**"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!" Psalm 34:8**

Hold fast to him!

**"For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly." Psalm 84:11**

Obey him!

**"we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28**

Love him!

**"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." Psalm 103:2-5**

Cling to him!

So,



**“till you hear the whistle blow  
Whatever you do, don’t let go.”**

- **Invitation to prayer ministry**
- **Song:** I Will Serve Thee
- **Benediction**