

Unshaken in Our Commitments

Psalm 15:1-4; Joshua 9:1-21

Today we continue in our sermon series called “Unshaken.” All throughout God’s Word we see that God wants us to be unshaken and unwavering in our faith. Yes, the storms of life hit us all and we all battle our own moments of pressure and temptation. Yes, the world challenges what we believe and tries to force us into its own mold. But through it all, God calls us to stand firm, unshaken in the midst of these things. In fact, He not only calls us, but He empowers us and enables us to stand firm in Him. This is clearly the first key to standing unshaken. Jesus said that the wise man is the one who anchors their life in Him. David wanted to know who would stand unshaken. When this life is over, who will be in the presence of God? Even in the storms of life today, who will enjoy close fellowship with God? The first key that we have discovered to standing strong is that those who stand unshaken are those who have a relationship with the Lord. God didn’t explain the details of a relationship to David in Psalm 15 because He didn’t have to. David already had a relationship with the Lord. This relationship is the basis of everything David asked God and the basis for everything God directed him to in His answer. See, David already knew God and pursued His heart. Literally, the Bible tells us of David that he was the “man after God’s own heart.” He knew God, loved God, and pursued knowing Him more. We see this clearly in **Psalm 27:4** where David summarizes the greatest desire of his life saying, “One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple.” In other words, David already had a personal relationship with God. To stand unshaken we, too, must have the same.

The second key for us to realize is that a relationship with God is not stagnant. It is living and, as a result, it is either growing or declining. The one who stands strong in their faith is the one who recognizes that it is a living, active relationship. In other words, our faith isn’t to be a historical thing where we focus on what took place years ago, months ago, or even days ago. Nor is it to simply be a stagnant thing where we only focus on our faith as if it is a state of being. Our faith is to be living and growing. We must understand that we are saved by faith alone, but true saving faith is never alone. We are saved the very moment that we repent of our sin and by faith confess Jesus to be our Lord and Savior. That is saving faith! However, when we have soul-saving faith we will begin to grow. In fact, throughout His Word, God even shows us specific areas that He wants us to grow. In **2 Peter 1:5-10** God says, “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply (add) moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.” God is saying, “Stay focused, keep growing, and you will stand strong, unshaken.” This reality is completely in line with what we see from David in Psalm 15. So far, we have seen three key evidences of those who will stand unshaken in their faith: Those

who are upright in their character, those who honor God in their conversation, and those who honor God by the relationships they keep. Today we discover a fourth key component of standing unshaken – Honoring God through keeping our word.

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This simple statement in Psalm 15 is a powerful statement that applies to every single one of us here today. It doesn't matter if you are 5, 55, or 105. Every single one of us have made and will continue to make promises in our life. I anticipate that most of us try to keep our promises, but I also anticipate that none of us have ever kept all our promises. Because we are all imperfect, I imagine that all of us have broken at least one promise in our lives and we have all probably been on the receiving end of a broken promise or two. Our word is our bond. When we give our word to do something we are making a commitment, a promise. Some of us think very little of our commitments, but here God is showing us that how we fulfill our commitments says more about us than we realize. Our commitments reveal more than just our own personal character. How we respond to our promises reveals the truth about our relationship with God. David asks, "God, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?" As God answers, He explains five characteristics of the man/woman who enjoys fellowship with Him. The clear evidence we see today is that one of the marks of fellowship with God is that we will keep our promises even when it is painful and difficult to do so. We will be committed and consistent to follow through. Even when it isn't convenient, comfortable, desirable, when it requires great sacrifice and costs, a person of integrity still fulfills their promises.

I believe that this is a message that is greatly needed in our culture today. In our world today, we are very hesitant to commit to anything, and then once we do, we are quick to give up and go another direction. For example, many commit to jobs, but when things get stressful and we are forced to do things that we don't prefer many quickly give up and look elsewhere. Many commit to school and to various programs. They enjoy the whole college experience but then when confronted with classes, professors, and responsibilities they are apt to give up and look elsewhere. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised, then, when many meet the guy or girl of their dreams. They grow in love, set a wedding date, and then tie the knot. They get married. During the "honeymoon" period of the relationship, everything is great. But soon the stresses of life catch up with them. Finances are causing a strain, their expectations aren't realistic, and the baby is crying in the background. And when these challenges arise, sadly many people look for the door and look for someone else. This attitude has even produced a society of church hoppers who change churches with the changing of the seasons. They like the music and the teaching and the environment, but, the moment they are asked to commit, they are gone. As a culture, we quickly neglect our commitments. This lack of fulfilling our promises is both dangerous and ungodly. God says that the person who can live on His holy hill is the one who keeps his promises, even when it costs him. Some, at this point, say, "Pastor, what's the point? Why should I make any promises or commitments at all?" In fact, there are some who even take Scripture out of context and suggest that it is unbiblical to make promises. They use **Matthew 5:33-37** as their key reference. There, Jesus said, "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' But I say to you, make NO OATH AT ALL, EITHER BY

HEAVEN, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.” Please understand that Jesus wasn’t saying that you shouldn’t make promises. He was saying that you shouldn’t make an oath where you pledge something that you have no control over. In that day people would say something like this, “I pledge by heaven to do _____. ” Or “I commit by the holy city Jerusalem to _____. ” Even in our day today we hear similar things. Today someone might say, “I swear on my grandmother’s grave.” Or, “I swear to God ...” Jesus says, “Don’t make a false vow and swear by anything as if you have control over such things. Instead, simply say, “yes” or “no.” In other words, our simple word should be enough. We don’t have to swear by anything. Just commit, “yes” or “no”, and stick to it. That’s very simple, but it begs a question. How do we know what to say “yes” to and how do we know what to say “no” to?

I believe the illustration found in Joshua 9 gives us several suggestions of what we should do in making commitments. If we take this message and apply it, I believe that God will help us to stand firm in our commitments.

I. Call Upon the Lord (vs. 1-14)

There are times in life that God teaches us through a positive example. There are other times that He teaches us through negative examples. Such is the case in Joshua 9. In this passage we see that Joshua made a major mistake. He made a promise that he shouldn’t have made, but we see how he was faithful to fulfill his promise in spite of the great cost. Though Joshua made a bad mistake, because he was faithful to honor God by keeping his promise, God took Joshua’s mistake and worked a great miracle.

Picture the scene with me. Joshua and the Israelites were in the process of claiming the land that God had promised them. Of course, their enemies weren’t simply handing the land over to them. God promised the land, promised to be with them, and promised to give them the land as they went from place to place. Up to this point they had conquered the great city of Jericho without a single weapon of war. Then they moved on to the city of Ai. Ai had won a small victory against them, but the next day God sent them back to Ai and gave them overwhelming victory. So, they continued their track through the land of Canaan to conquer the rest of the land. Suddenly, they were approached by some strangers. The people appeared to be from a great distance away. They had worn out sacks on their donkeys, worn out wineskins, worn out sandals, worn out clothes, and they even had dried bread. They had the appearance of being from far away. Then they even said that they were from far away. Then came the big request. They asked Joshua to establish a covenant, a promise, with them that the Israelites would not harm them but instead have peace with them. Let me ask you, “What would you do?” There is no doubt that Joshua and the leaders weren’t expecting this. These people seemed to come from nowhere. They expected people to respond like Jericho and hide within the city walls. They expected people to come against them like the people of Ai. They weren’t anticipating someone to approach them through deception. They didn’t expect someone to come asking for a promise of protection. What would you do? Sadly, for Joshua, he chose to make a commitment with a people that he had no business making

a commitment to. But, why? Why did he make this hasty decision? There are several reasons, but the first and most important is found in **verse 14**, he “did not ask for the counsel of the Lord.”

Many people get themselves in all sorts of trouble by making decisions without asking for the counsel of the Lord. Sometimes we ignore the Lord in decisions because we think He isn't interested, doesn't care, or has more important things to do. Sometimes we ignore Him because we are too busy, too distracted, or simply don't want to know His desires. Friend, God wants us to seek Him and even promises to answer if we do. **James 1:5** says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” **Proverbs 3:5-6**, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” The reason that the Israelites made this covenant was because Joshua and the leaders of Israel were impulsive and didn't take time to consult the Lord. They got ahead of God. After listening to the strangers' speech and examining the evidence, Joshua and his leaders concluded that the men were telling the truth. The leaders of Israel took the “scientific approach” instead of the “spiritual approach.” They depended on their own senses, examined the “facts,” and agreed on a conclusion. It was all very logical and convincing, but it was all wrong. They were walking by sight and not by seeking God. In our fast-paced culture today we need to hear this. We must be intentional in seeking God, but we must also be willing to wait on God. **Alan Redpath** said it well, “Never, Never, Never, trust your own judgment in anything. When common sense says that a course is right, lift your heart to God for the path of faith and of blessing may be in the direction completely opposite to that which you call common sense. When voices tell you the action is urgent, that something must be done immediately, refer everything to heaven. Then if you are still uncertain, stand still. If you are called on to act and have not time to pray, then don't act. If you are called on to move in a certain direction and can't wait for the Lord to lead, then don't move. Be still and brave enough to stand and wait on God for none of them that wait on Him shall ever be ashamed.”

God wants to make His will known to us. We simply must seek Him. But, we shouldn't come to God as if we are customers who are looking for options, trying to determine what we like and don't like. We are to come to Him as servants with a desire to discover His will and a willingness to obey Him. When we come to Him in this way, He will answer and move. As we are confronted with choices, needs, expectations, and desires of everyone in our lives, we must first and foremost look to the Lord and ask for His wisdom and His direction in what to do.

II. Consider the Counsel of Elders (vs. 15)

Obviously, there is no more important point than the first that is mentioned. We must first and foremost seek the Lord. God's counsel must take precedence. But, there is a second vital thing we must do. We must consider the counsel of Godly people in our lives. God's Word is filled with this encouragement. **Proverbs 1:5** says, “A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.” **Proverbs 11:14** says, “Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.” **Proverbs 12:15**, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.” The counsel of others can help us have wisdom in making decision and promises. The Israelites made the wrong decision here. They gave their oath to the enemy. But, how many times did they gather

the elders of Israel together to discuss the issues? How many times did they get away from the situation and talk through it all? Not a single time. They simply saw the Gibeonites' provisions, listened to their story, had a brief conversation with them, and made a quick decision. They didn't take the time to discuss the situation and the implications. They could have at least waited until morning to decide what to do. They could have studied Deuteronomy to be reminded of God's clear written instructions. They could have gone back and remembered the warnings that Moses gave them. They could have done many things in order that they would make the best decision, but they simply refused to bring the elders together. I feel for them in this moment. I'm sure that they felt they needed to make a quick decision. I'm sure that they felt compassion in that moment. After all, these strangers were supposedly exhausted, hungry, and a long way from home. But, they still missed the opportunity. Why didn't Joshua at least seek the counsel of the leaders? I can't answer for him, but I can answer for me.

Let me ask you, "What keeps you from seeking the counsel of Godly people?" There can be a great number of hindrances such as a busy schedule, a feeling of insecurity, not wanting to interrupt, etc. But, I think there are two primary things that hinder us on a regular basis: **First, our pride often hinders us from seeking counsel.** We feel like we can handle things, or at least that we should be able to handle things on our own. At times our pride causes us to feel embarrassment and fear rejection if people knew what we were dealing with. It takes humility to acknowledge our need for others and then reach out to them for counsel and advice. **Second, it takes patience.** The easy thing to do is to storm ahead with our own ideas and decisions. Joshua could have asked for counsel from the elders, but instead he stormed ahead with his plan. ****ILL:** Don't neglect the counsel of Godly people. I've done this before and it has always led to heartache. I am not alone. This is what the Israelites did. In your weekly Scripture this week you will read Judges 11, about a man named Jephthah. He did much the same. He wanted to honor God, but he ignorantly and foolishly rushed ahead and made a hasty promise that was very costly. Friend, we must seek God's will in all things and we are wise to seek the counsel of other Godly people in our lives as well.

III. Count the Cost of Commitment (vs. 16-18)

The third key step that we should take in making promises is that we must count the cost of the commitment being made. When Joshua faced the Gibeonites they were requesting a peace treaty. Because he acted hastily, they didn't take the time to really examine these people. They didn't take the time to ask any specific questions about where they were from. In fact, they never even told him the land they were from. Who signs a peace treaty with a people that couldn't even give the location of their origin? How foolish was this? Joshua and the Israelites made this decision assuming that this promise wouldn't cost them very much. They made their decision on their false assumptions instead of on the factual realities of the situation. Even a brief evaluation would have caused them to examine the pros and the cons of such a commitment.

We learn from this that we shouldn't be flippant about the promises we make. We must count the cost and then be willing to follow through. Jesus Himself taught this. When He was dealing with the issue of discipleship in Luke 14 He gave a powerful principle to live by. In **Luke 14:28, 31** He said, "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?" And then in **verse 31** says, "Or what king, when

he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?" In those verses Jesus is talking about discipleship and considering the cost before you follow Him, but the application is true also of the decisions and commitment we make. Before you make a promise, you need to seriously consider the cost. If you're making a decision about a course of study, you have to consider the time, the challenges, the finances, the difficulties of the particular program. If you are considering marriage, you have to consider the time, the sacrifices, the needs of your spouse, etc. If you are contemplating a job, you have to consider the environment, the hours, how it affects your family, and how it fits into God's calling on your life. If you are considering a church or a ministry, you should consider the will of God, the work of God, and the sacrifices that must be made. Simply put, we must count the cost.

IV. Commit Yourself to Fulfill the Promises You Have Made (vs. 19-21)

Joshua gave the peace treaty and the people went on their merry way. The Israelites then later resumed their journey through Canaan. It didn't take long for Joshua to discover that he had been duped. In fact, three days later he heard the truth. The people weren't from a distant land. They were from Gibeon. In fact, Gibeon was only 25 miles away from where the Israelites were located. They were the next major city to conquer. Well, what do you do? What would you do if you were in their shoes? Many would argue, "Well, they tricked you and lied to you, so the peace treaty is null and void." Many would say, "The promise doesn't matter because it was based on a lie." But what does God say? God says that the person who knows Him and has fellowship with Him keeps his promise even when it's hard, even when it hurts, even when it's costly. The Israelites had already given a vow of peace to the Gibeonites. What does God say about our vows? **Ecclesiastes 5:4-6a**, "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake." In other words, honor God by fulfilling your promise. Some might say, "But, Pastor, that can't be right." Friend, it is important to God that we keep our promises. In Saul's day he didn't have the commitment to God's Word like Joshua did. Saul knew the decision between the Israelites and the Gibeonites. But one day he got mad and killed several of them. And not long after that a severe famine came on the land, and David said, "Lord, why the famine?" And God surprised David with his answer. God said, "I have sent the famine on the land because Saul put the Gibeonites to death." In other words, God cursed the land of Israel with a famine for three years because they had acted against the covenant they made with these very people. Keeping our promises is important to God.

There is no doubt that Joshua made a promise hastily and prematurely; however, he did what many of us would not have done. **What should we do when we make a hasty promise? We should fulfill our promise and trust God to see what He will do with your act of commitment.** You know what the average person does when they make a hasty mistake? They make another mistake thinking that it will make it all right, but two wrongs never make a right. ****ILL:** A person marries someone outside of the will of God, and they start having problems. Then, the person realizes that they've made a serious mistake. The world says, "Well, just get a divorce. God understands."

When people follow through with that action, they limit God and what He could do in that marriage and in their own lives. And they inevitably bring hurt and pain upon themselves and their children and their children's children. We should be faithful to fulfill our promises even if they were made prematurely. Maybe you are thinking, "But, Pastor, it's too late for me. What can I do now?" I suggest three simple things.

A. Repent of the Promises You Have Broken

A broken promise is a sin against God, but it is not an unforgiveable sin. If there is a promise you have broken that you can't change, first and foremost, repent of it and seek God's forgiveness. **1 John 1:9**, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

B. Rely on the Power of God

You may have messed up. You may have made a mistake, but when we surrender to God and let Him have His way, He can create a beautiful masterpiece from the mess that we put in His hands. **Romans 8:28**, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

C. Renew Your Focus to be Faithful

Can you imagine the surprise that must have come over Joshua when he realized the truth? What do you do in that moment? For Joshua, he renewed his focus on keeping his promise and staying faithful to his word. He chose to obey God and trust Him.

Maybe you're wondering, "So whatever happened to those Gibeonites?" Well, never underestimate God's ability to turn our mistakes into miracles. God can use anything to accomplish His purposes. God used Joshua's hasty promise as a means to bring about a powerful military victory over five kings at one time. But, there was more to the story than that. The Gibeonites were given the responsibility of supplying all of the water and wood that was used at the tabernacle. Then later on in the Old Testament, in **Ezra 2**, we see that the Levites needed help in their services at the temple. God instructed them to have the Gibeonites assist in serving. **Warren Wiersbe** said this of them, "It's likely that their service in the tabernacle and later in the temple, influenced them to abandon their idols and worship the God of Israel because Ezra 2 strongly suggests that they (the Gibeonites) were fully devoted to the Lord and His house."

Are there any promises that you've made to God or to others that you haven't yet fulfilled? Repent of your sins and commit today to fulfill what you have promised. As Jesus said in **Matthew 5:37**, "Simply let your 'yes' be 'yes,' and your 'no,' 'no'." May God help us to be people of integrity who keep our promises, even when it's difficult to do so.