

**SERMON – 3/11/24**  
**'It is Finished'**

Joshua 18:1-10

Philippians 3:7-14

"Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance."  
(Psalm 16:5-6).

Those of you who take the time to look at the intimations in advance of a Sunday at what we are to be reading in church may have been slightly alarmed to see that our focus this morning was to be on no fewer than eight chapters of Joshua, and those of you who turned those chapters up would perhaps have been even more concerned to see that those chapters consist almost entirely of the kind of lists of names of places and mountains and rivers that you might expect to see in the title deeds for a large estate. For example in the opening verses of Joshua 15 we read that "The land allotted to the tribe of Judah according to its clans... started from the bay at the southern end of the Dead Sea, crossed south of Scorpion Pass, continued on to Zin and went over to the south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it ran past Hezron up to Addar and curved around to Karka. It then passed along to Azmon and joined the Wadi of Egypt, ending at the Mediterranean Sea." And that was just the *southern* boundary of *one* of the Twelve Tribes. If you have not read it, just imagine that kind of passage repeated for the other boundaries of the inheritance of Judah and then repeated again for all the other tribes and you get a good idea of what is contained in these pages.

But when I read in 1 Timothy 3 that "all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the child of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" it makes me realise the sheer effort of copying and re-copying such chapters as these before the advent of printing and that either the scribes were sadly deluded and badly wasting their time or there really *is* something of God's Word for us in them. It is the latter approach that I have always taken as I prepare to preach and if I can't

immediately see what the message of a particular passage is, I regard it as something of a challenge to seek it out as I wait upon the Lord.

Now, obviously you are going to find a lot more in a few verses of the Gospels or the rest of the New Testament than you do in a few verses of these chapters of Joshua – we have to come to different parts of the Bible with different specs on – but if you approach the Scriptures with a desire to listen for what God may be saying through every page, you *will* find something of use and of blessing in even the most apparently dry passages of the Bible.

The key for me as I thought about this morning's chapters in preparation for this morning came in a verses that comes from elsewhere in the Bible, that verse which I quoted at the beginning from Psalm 16 where King David writes: "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance." (Ps.16:5-6). Those are words I have long treasured, as I hope I can explain to you as we go along this morning. Ordinarily when you read Psalm 16 you tend to get hooked by another verse that is one of the few places in the Old Testament where there is a clear reference to the resurrection of the dead and naturally that tends to be what you focus on in any study of that Psalm. But it is the phrase about the boundary lines falling in pleasant places that has kept coming to my mind this week as I have thought about these chapters of Joshua, where there are pages and pages of boundary lines recorded as the Promised Land is allotted to the different tribes and clans and families as their inheritance. It has prompted me to think about where the boundary lines have fallen for me over the years and I encourage you to do the same this morning.

The psalmist celebrates before God that he has received particular blessings from God's hand that no-one else has had and that make his spirit rejoice in a deeply personal way. Surely each one of us could testify to times in our lives when we have known God's blessing in ways that are unique to us. For example, I think back to when I was a teenager and I could very easily have gone badly astray as I got in with a dodgy crowd, but by the grace of God I was led in the right paths. When my

studies at school and then at university could have led me in various directions I had a very clear sense of God's call on my life and I count it the most incredible privilege to serve the Lord as a parish minister. (As my own minister at home used to say frequently – Who, once called to be a preacher, would stoop to be a king?) I give thanks to God often for the friends I have been given at various stages in my life who have brought me great blessing, and most of all for the gift of a wife and children who have taught me more than I could ever tell and shaped what I have become. In ways that were clear and unmistakable I was called to a parish in the Borders and to a developing ministry there over 20 years in bringing together what had been four congregations and then equally clearly and unmistakably I was called to Kinross 16 years ago and again to a developing ministry as we begin to work together more closely with our neighbours across the county. The psalmist hits the nail on the head for me: “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.”

In rather the same way as the people of Israel might have read these chapters of Joshua so I can run my finger round the maps of the places I have been blessed to call home and celebrate the views that are imprinted on my memory – my earliest memories of Hong Kong harbour or the South China Sea from the Peak, Ben Ledi from Dykedale Farm above Dunblane, the skyline of St Andrews from the West Sands during my student days, the whole realm of nature in Liddesdale from the White Yett above Newcastleton or the Lake District Fells across the Solway from Canonbie or Loch Leven and the Sleeping Giant from the heights of the back road from Glenfarg. And with the views I call to mind all the people I have had the privilege to know and work alongside in all these places. “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.”

But before we get carried away with enthusiasm for the good things that God has given, there will have been times that we have all complained bitterly about our lot and how we are hard done by in comparison to others. There were those among the people of Israel who complained that they had not been allotted enough territory. The people of Joseph pointed out that they

were a big tribe and that they didn't have enough land allotted to them, but Joshua is a match for them as he replies: 'If you are so numerous, and if the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves there in the land of the Perizzites and Rephaites.' (Josh.17:15) How often do we want our blessings handed to us on a plate, when sometimes part of the blessing is to be found in the actual process of striving for it.

Perhaps today you sit with a tear in your eye as you count your blessings and silently give thanks to God for the particular inheritance you have received from Him. Or perhaps you may feel that God's blessing has passed you by, that you have staggered through life from one disaster to another, and that far from blessing you God has actually abandoned you. I don't pretend to have an answer to the question of why some folk – good and faithful people – are sometimes led through periods of great personal suffering. I can only read the words of David who suffered greatly in a variety of circumstances during his life but who could still raise his voice in praise of God, and I can only read the words of Paul who faced more beatings and spent more time unjustly in prison than any of us will probably ever do but who could still write that "Godliness with contentment is great gain for we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it." (1 Tim.6:6-7)

All of us, whether we have blessings to count or grievances to plead before God on account of the way the boundary lines have fallen for us, all of us need to look beyond the purely physical side of things because in Christ Jesus the providence of God stretches beyond the horizons of this world. Jesus has drained the cup of God's wrath for us to the very dregs. He struggled for us in Gethsemane and in the forsakenness of the Cross, choosing to accept the suffering and death that lay ahead of Him and enduring it in our place so that we might have an inheritance of staggering magnitude – eternity in the presence of the living God.

And it is that vista which Paul opens to us in the verses we read earlier from Philipians: "Whatever were gains to me, he says, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss... that I may gain Christ and be found in him... I

want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Phil.3:7-14)

Whether the boundary lines have fallen for you in pleasant places in this world or not, lift your eyes above the horizons of this earthly realm today and take hold by faith of the Promised Land that is held out to us in Jesus Christ. For it is in *that* change of perspective that everything will make sense.