

Be careful!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 March 2017

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0:00] Be careful. This world is full of things to be careful of, isn't it? Email scams, driveway hijackers, as I was reminded of this week, smash and grab robbers.

There's lots of things, aren't there, in this world that we've got to watch out for on a daily basis. Give me some more things. Tell me, you tell me, what are some of the things that we've got to be careful of on a daily basis?

Anyone? Taxis, all right? You've always got to be aware what taxis are doing. You can't assume that they're going to obey the road rules, all right? Anything else? What have we got to be careful of?

Anyone? Come on. Don't be shy. What's that? Con artists. Yeah, they're all over the place, aren't they? People who you think they've got a legitimate story, but they're actually just trying to get your money.

What else? Motherly cool. Maybe I should stop this while we're here. Anything else to be careful of? Come on, tell me some of the dangers we've got to be careful of in our lives, yeah?

[1:10] Robberies? House robberies? Yeah. I mean, we hear quite often of people just in the road along from us or close to where we live with the home invasion. And so you've got to be careful.

You've got to lock your doors at night. You've got to... You can't just leave everything unlocked and go to bed if you live in this country, if you live in this world. We've got to be careful. And now I'll stop you there because it might go out of control.

But there are lots of things, aren't there, that we've got to be cautious of. We've got to be careful of. We've got to live as careful people in a world where we're surrounded by dangers. Well, it was no different for the early Israelites who had just conquered the promised land.

Their war was over. They were in this new land that they had to start developing. There were still enemies around them that hadn't been conquered.

And now their great commander-in-chief, Joshua, is pretty much on his way out of the scene. And he's worried that once he's gone, the people of Israel will now drop their guard, take it easy, put their feet up, crack open a beer or two, and not carry on being careful.

[2:12] And so that's really the heart of his sermon, this final sermon in Joshua, chapter 23. It's a warning, really, to carry on being careful.

It's a warning to God's people to carry on being careful. And he lists some important things that they must be careful of. But amongst all of these things, what stands out is that he says one thing that they need to be careful of above all other things.

And it's, in fact, the only thing he emphasizes that they be very careful of. It's an emphatic, like, you've got to be careful of many things. But this is the one thing above everything else that you've got to be very careful of.

You know what it is? I wonder if you spotted it. You find it in verse 11. Be careful to love God. See, in Joshua's eyes, the greatest danger God's people faced was not enemies, not economic collapse, or not even religious threats from the surrounding nations.

The greatest danger God's people faced was losing their love for God. Isn't that something? Isn't that striking to you? And as I was preparing this passage to preach now, this last week, that verse 11 really stood out for me.

[3:32] Because I think that's the greatest danger we face today as Christians, each and every one of us. Because we can be as religious as we want. We can go to church as much as we want.

We can be all that we want to on the outside, and yet deep down inside, where nobody else sees, our love for God can still be left severely wanting.

And even disappear without us noticing. And if that happens, then everything is lost. No matter how careful we are to have a daily quiet time or go to church, if we don't really love God, what's the point?

What's the point of all of this? What's the point of coming to church and singing songs? Reading the Word of God. If we don't, in our heart of hearts, where nobody else sees, love God truly.

And so this morning, I just want to focus just on that verse, verse 11. And I want to get us thinking why we need to take this command of Joshua to be careful to love God as seriously today as the Israelites did back then.

[4 : 35] And the first reason, really, we need to take this command seriously is because love is a really misunderstood concept in our modern world today. It's something that doesn't actually just happen by itself like our world might tell us it does.

You know, this Western romantic view of love that's been hammered into our brains is that love is all about emotional, fuzzy feelings.

And you fall in love. You know that phrase, you fall in love, we use it all the time? It kind of implies that you have no control over what you love. It just happens without any kind of say from your side. And that's the view of love that our world wants to give us, tells us when we watch, you know, love stories, movies, things like that. That's the kind of view of love that's portrayed. But the Bible's view of love is quite different.

Because the Bible teaches us that who or what we love is very much in our control. It's up to us where we direct our affections. What we focus our love and affection on.

[5 : 39] Otherwise, you know, the commands in the Bible to love God and love each other, which Jesus says is the summary of the entire law of God. But the commands to love would be pointless if love wasn't something we chose to give.

If love wasn't something that we chose to direct in a certain way. And so the first thing we've got to do this morning as we try to understand this command to be careful to love God.

The first thing we've got to do is get away from this idea that love is some force beyond our control that influences us, but we have no influence over. That's actually a very, very unhelpful way to think about love.

Because for one, that kind of thinking is the reason so many marriages fail today. Let me explain what I mean. A spouse no longer feels love for their partner.

And so they think the marriage is automatically over. As if love is something with a mind of its own that's just up and left. But no, the truth is when a spouse no longer feels love for their partner, it's mostly because they haven't lifted a finger to work on that love.

[6 : 45] They haven't been careful to love. Over the years, to nurture and cultivate love for their spouse. Thinking that it'll just somehow nurture itself because that's what the movies tell you.

But love doesn't work that way. Love is something that needs to be nurtured and needs to be carefully cultivated in our lives. Love for one another and love for God.

I mean, if you're into gardening, who likes gardening? Who enjoys a spot of gardening? Yeah? Good? And I've visited some of your houses and I've seen your lovely gardens.

Not so lovely now in the drought. But I know that many of you are passionate about gardening. And you'll know, if you're into gardening, you'll know with plants. Plants don't just nurture themselves, do they?

They need outside help to grow and flourish. They need sunlight, first of all. If you put a plant in a dark room, it's going to wither and fade. They need space for their roots. You can't put a big plant in a tiny little pot.

[7 : 45] They need nutrients from the ground. You can't just plant them in the sand. You've got to make sure that they've got enough nutrients. And of course, as we know all too well, they need water. They need water to grow and flourish.

Well, you see, love is like that too. It needs care and nurture in order to develop and strengthen and flourish. And by the way, don't get love.

This is another mistake people often make. Don't get love confused with the feelings that love gives us. You see, our world tells us that love is just the feelings you have. No, love is something much deeper.

The feelings are really just the fruit. Nice, tasty fruit, but the fruit of the plant of love. You know what I mean? And the fruit in a plant can come and go.

Just like the feelings, the warm, fuzzy feelings we get at certain times in a relationship with someone can also come and go. But the tree remains irrespective of whether the fruit is there or not.

[8 : 48] And I'll go back to marriage, for example. I say marriage, even if you're not married, marriage is something that we all have experience with growing up or our friends.

And marriage is, God has given us the relationship of marriage as a foreshadow and a prototype of the kind of relationship that he's calling us to have with him as his people.

So that's why I talk about marriage. But also, marriage is kind of a laboratory where we get to learn what love really is and how it really works. But in a marriage in which there's no fruit, and sadly there are many marriages like that where there's just no feelings of love yet, in which love is just not felt, it's been dried up.

That marriage doesn't have to be dug up. It doesn't have to be destroyed. It may just need a bit of work, a little bit of TLC. But so many couples don't do that.

So many couples don't work on their marriages because they think love is something that's just beyond their control that they can't have any influence over. We've got to get away from that idea that love is a force outside of ourselves.

[9 : 54] No, love, you choose what to love. And sadly, that idea is also a reason that spouses end up committing adultery. How many times does a man who's left his wife and family for another woman give the excuse, oh, but I love this other woman.

I can't control it. Have you heard that? Have you come across people like, I love this, I'm head over heels, I can't control it. Yes, you can. Learn to man up and get a grip on your feelings and stop being a slave to them like this world has taught you to be.

We live in a culture that's so led by feeling and stimulation, isn't it? It's so led by gratifying your feelings, your desires right now, that we've literally forgotten how to get control of what we direct our affections towards.

And we end up loving things that we shouldn't without even noticing it. Well, you know, that's really a major reason Joshua gives to God's people here to be careful to love God.

He says he tells them to be careful to love God simply because he knows it's so easy for them to love other things. The things that the neighboring nations can give them.

[11 : 12] In your Bibles, look at verse 7. And just look what he says here as he's leading up to this command to be careful to love God. He says, do not associate with these nations that remain among you.

Do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God as you have until now. And then skip over to verse 12.

But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you, and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive these nations out before you.

Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes until you perish from this good land which the Lord God has given you.

Now, it's interesting in this phrase, just look back at verse 8, where he says, hold fast to the Lord. It's the same word in the original language as the word he uses in verse 12 when he talks about holding fast to these other nations.

[12 : 16] It's probably translated ally yourself, but it's the same word. This word hold fast, it's a word that can also be translated cling to or cleave.

In fact, it's the same word used to describe the commitment that God calls for between a husband and a wife in marriage. A permanent clinging to, cleaving to, holding fast.

And the point of Joshua using that word here is that when you're clinging to one thing, you can't cling to another thing at the same time. That's the whole essence of this word.

It's a wholehearted clinging to one thing alone. You're committed to either one or the other. And so Joshua is saying to the people here, you will either be committed to loving God or you will be committed to loving the world and what the world can give you, what these surrounding nations can give you.

But you can't be committed to both. You can't cling to both. You can't cling to what this world can give you and cling to God at the same time.

[13 : 23] And I stress Joshua saying that because that's what we need to hear today, don't we? We live in a world that is constantly trying to seduce us at every turn without us noticing.

Everywhere we go, the world is trying to seduce us with pleasures and satisfactions and security and all of these things that the world is promising to be able to give us.

We're being offered gratification and pleasures and lifestyles more in this age than any age before. Things to chase after and cling to because that's what the culture around us chases after and cling to and we don't even think about it.

We just do it because it's what's done. It's what everyone does. It's what everyone chases after. And so we need to desperately hear Joshua's warning in verse 11. If you're clinging to the world, you can't cling to God at the same time.

You need to choose what you love, brothers and sisters. Each of us needs to choose what we love. What takes your attention?

[14 : 30] Where you seek your happiness and satisfaction? Because it's very easy to say, oh, yeah, I'm a good Christian, I love God, but then chase after everything else in life.

No, you know, I can't tell you what you love. Only you know, deep down inside, so you've got to ask yourself that question. What do you truly love? What do you cling to? What do you chase after? John says in 1 John 2, which Alan read for us earlier, do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.

That's quite clear, isn't it? And it's quite hard hitting. If anyone loves the world, you can't love the Father at the same time. You've got to choose. You can't love the world and love God.

And the reason that I want to stress this this morning is because it's so easy to love the world, isn't it? There's so many things in the world that are attractive and easy, easy to fall in love with the things of the world without noticing it.

[15 : 36] Even Christians who have committed themselves to God can have illicit affairs with the world. Think about it. Think about what an affair is. Affair, an affair.

When we talk about someone having an affair, it's just breaking faith with your spouse because someone else has caught your attention and makes you feel more excited than your spouse does. And, you know, as self-righteous Christians, when someone has an affair, we look our noses down at them.

Oh, you know, how unfaithful they were. How dare they break their marriage covenant with their spouse. And rightly so. They shouldn't. But how many times every week do we break faith with our God, put Him aside, ignore what He wants because something else in our week has caught our attention and excites us more than God does?

What hypocrites we are. So ask yourself, where is your love? What do you love? What are you clinging to most of your week?

Yes, you sing songs to God on Sunday morning, but what are you really loving and pursuing on Monday? God? What are you doing today? God? Or your career? Or your TV shows?

[16 : 45] Or your human relationships? What excites you? Your sport? Your money? Your hobby? What do you pursue?

What are you thinking about? What is your heart clinging to? Do you love them more than you love God? Do they excite you more than God does? You've got to choose what you cling to.

You've got to choose what you direct your attentions towards and your affections towards. I mean, that has hit me very hard this week, and I hope it hits you as well.

Be careful to love the Lord your God. But how? You know, how can we make sure that we are, as God's people, clinging to God and not the world when it's so easy for us to love the things of the world?

Well, here's how. Joshua tells us, and he says this, he says, remember what God has given you. That's how we will make sure that we keep coming back to loving God and being careful to love God.

[17 : 52] It's a profoundly simple idea. Remember what God has given you. But it's, in Joshua's sermon, it's really the key that he gives to loving God as we should. I mean, look at, look again in your Bibles at Joshua's sermon here.

And look at the point that he makes over and over and over again in his speech as he's exhorting the Israelites to cling to God. Verse 3, look what he repeats.

He says, you yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake. It was the Lord God who fought for you. Then verse 9, the Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations.

Verse 10, one of you writes a thousand because the Lord your God fights for you just as he promised. Verse 14, you know with all your heart and soul that not one of the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed.

Every promise has been fulfilled. Not one has failed. He's trying to make a point here. Okay? As he exhorts these people to love and cling to God, he's trying to make the point, remember, remember, remember all that God has done for you and given you and how everything you have right now is completely dependent on God.

[19 : 07] The world didn't give this to you. God did. And not only what he has given you but what he still promises to give you. Verse 5, look at it, talking about the remaining enemies.

Joshua says, the Lord your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you and you will take possession of their land as the Lord your God has promised you. See, he wants to remind the Israelites over and over to remember everything you now have and enjoy and will enjoy in the future comes solely from the hand of God.

But the moment you forget that, the moment you forget that all of this is from God and the moment you think that the world can satisfy you more than God, well then the very things you chase after for satisfaction will instead, verse 13, become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes until you perish from this good land which the Lord your God has given you.

Well the same is true for us as Christians today and the things that we chase after in life. Even the good things we enjoy in this world, family, good food, holidays, entertainment, while those things aren't necessarily bad in and of themselves, it is far too easy for us to start loving those gifts more than we love the giver of those gifts.

And then they end up being our idols which eventually destroy us and take us away from God. You know that's why sometimes God has to remove good things in our lives because we find ourselves chasing after those good things more than God.

[20 : 46] And those things, those good things that He wants us to enjoy actually become destructive for us because we chase after them. Because they steal our love. Because we're so fickle. And so don't wonder why even if you are God's child God takes away things in your life.

He wants to remind you it's not about the things, it's not about His blessings, it's about Him and relationship with Him. But all too often we end up being like children.

You've probably seen this happen. Children who get a birthday present from some granny or family member and then they see this birthday present and they walk off so taken with the gift that they forget who gave it to them.

Have you seen that before? You know, birthdays or Christmas, the child is so taken with this radio-controlled car and then later he's like, Mommy, who gave this to me? You know, or they don't even ask that question, they don't care, they're just taken with the present.

Well, that's us. That's us with God. We do that with God's gifts all the time. We enjoy God's gifts, we get absorbed in the blessings and the good things of life that we forget God Himself.

[21 : 56] You know how the book of Romans describes the chief cause of mankind's drift away from God? In Romans 1, it's a very heavy chapter in Romans. It's worth going home and reading though. And it describes just how we've come into the state we're in today where the world is broken, where we're all, you know, the world has this broken relationship with God.

Why? Well, this is why. Romans 1, 21, although people knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him. That's it. That was the start of the decline.

We just forgot to thank God. God. And so they worshipped and served, created things rather than the Creator. That was the cause of idolatry.

Just a simple forgetfulness of who has given us all of this. Who has given us, who the source is of everything we enjoy in life. You enjoy something in life.

You enjoy some things. Even if your life is rubbish at the moment, there's still some things you enjoy. Well, you know what? Everything you enjoy and even your capacity to enjoy something has only been given to you by God.

[22 : 59] You are unable to enjoy anything without God giving you that thing. And so the first step to making sure we love God rather than the world is to recognize this in our own lives.

To recognize that everything good we enjoy in life comes from God. Without Him, we would have nothing. No life, no happiness, nothing. And that means just a simple, routine, daily thankfulness to God for everything we enjoy.

Stopping and refocusing our attention to God and thanking Him for these small things in life that we enjoy. That's how we, through this discipline of thankfulness in our prayers, when you pray, don't go immediately into God, here's a list of stuff that I want you to give me.

No, God is not some vending machine in the sky. When you pray, be thankful. Be, start with prayers of thanks.

Just stop and recognize how contingent your happiness is on God providing that to you. And that everything you enjoy and every little bit of pleasure you have in life is only because God has seen fit to give that to you.

[24 : 19] If you start to recognize that constantly in your prayers, then you will start to divert the love that you have for those gifts back to the giver where the love rightfully should be.

But also, it's not just about the things we have now in this broken world because I know many of you don't have many things to enjoy in this world. You feel, more than others, you feel the brokenness of this world and that's true.

Pleasures, even the greatest pleasures in this world are just temporary and just fleeting and they last only so long. And that's why the ultimate motivation to cling to God as His people should not be what He's given us now but what He promises to give us in the future.

A new life in a new world with pleasures forevermore. The Bible is not ashamed to show us that God wants to give us pleasures forevermore.

And the reason we will have pleasures forevermore is because we will be with God in a relationship of perfect love untainted by sin where He will satisfy our every desire in Himself because He is the source of all that is good and joyous and pleasurable.

[25 : 40] And you know why that no matter how much you chase after in this life you can't quite get satisfaction from it not full satisfaction because you have been designed to find your full satisfaction in God alone and in relationship with Him and that is what He promises to give you and He has made possible through Jesus Christ.

Even the greatest pleasures we enjoy in this life are mere shadows of the pleasure that God has made us to enjoy in Him. And we have this hope only because He sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins to open up the way to eternal life to qualify us for this new world.

And when you believe that and you know what's coming and you live your life in light of what's coming when you know what God has done to save you and when that excites you when you're actually excited by your salvation and the hope of eternal life that's when you fall down in worship and praise with heartfelt love this incredible God who has done so much for you how can you not when you realize what He has given you and what He promises you as His child.

But perhaps this morning you don't feel that. Perhaps you were standing here singing those songs and you really didn't feel them. You really you weren't being genuine you were just mouthing the words you don't feel this love for God.

Well maybe it's because you've never tasted that hope of eternal life. Or maybe you once did but it's faded. This world seems so much more real and immediate and solid than the one to come so you keep on slipping back into this world and clinging to it and loving it even though it never satisfies you.

[27 : 27] You just can't help yourself. Well the first thing I want to do for you this morning is hold out the gospel again and invite you to see in Jesus all that God has done for you to give you a real sure hope of eternal life.

To see that all of your sins that you know too well that disqualify you from eternal life were taken by Jesus on the cross if only you would trust and follow Him.

To realize that this life on earth is only the beginning and God has made you for something much better that lasts forever and come to Jesus to receive that gift of eternal life if you haven't yet.

And if you have well then I tell you this morning in closing be careful. Be careful to ensure that the blessings you have not just in this life but in the life to come keep directing your attention back to the God who gave them to you and be careful to ensure that your love and your passion in this life is first and foremost centered on Him not in the things that He gives you.

Daily in your quiet times in your prayer times use those occasions to refocus your love use those occasions as opportunities every day to get your heart back to God to refocus your love away from

the world and on to the God who loves you and made you to enjoy Him above all other things because if you're not doing that then all of this is rather pointless.

[29 : 06] And so let's pray for God's help to be careful to love Him with all our heart. Let's bow our heads. In the words of the psalmist Lord you alone are my portion and my cup you make my lot secure the boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places surely I have a delightful inheritance I will praise the Lord who counsels me even at night my heart instructs me I keep my eyes always on the Lord with Him at my right hand I will not be shaken therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices my body will also rest secure because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead nor will you let your faithful one see decay you have made known to me the paths of life you will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand Lord may these words of the psalmist be true of all of us this morning Lord we confess to you how often our love for you grows cold deep down in our hearts where no one else sees we pray Lord that as we've heard your voice speak to us this morning to be careful to love you that you would help us to do that help us to have an attitude of thankfulness help us to redirect our thoughts our attentions our excitement of the things of the world back to you the great giver of all of the things we enjoy and Lord help us to live and look forward to the life to come which you have opened up through Jesus Christ help us to follow him help us to trust him help us to love him with all our heart all our soul all our mind and all our strength we pray these things in Jesus name alone

Amen Amen Amen Amen be with history düricht yes and to be with la n