

Joshua 15.1-19 | Knowing your borders
December 28, 2014

Introduction to Boundaries

The final sermon of 2014 is aimed at helping you write, or rewrite, your resolutions for 2015. Clearly, that requires preaching from the most obscure text I could find. For those unfamiliar, the book of Joshua records the fulfillment of a promise made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier. Joshua was one of two survivors from an unfaithful generation God allowed to die in the wilderness 40 years after leaving Egypt. Moses dies and Joshua is appointed to lead the new generation into Canaan. Essentially, it is a book of war, where God's army reclaims God's land and brings it under God's rule. By chapter 12, most of the conquest is over and, by chapter 15; Joshua begins distributing land among the 12 tribes, allotting the largest portion to the largest tribe, Judah. Though this passage may not be immediately invigorating, we must never forget that 2,500 years ago the Israelites savored every last detail of the boundary descriptions.

The chapter begins with a description of the geographic boundaries of Judah's inheritance and ends with the names of the 100+ cities within those boundaries. **We can imagine what it meant for Judah to hear about the details of their portion.** Beginning with this chapter, and lasting through the next few, we cannot avoid the repetition of the word **BOUNDARY**. In the first 12 verses, the word appears 19 times. The word is used to delineate the actual geographical boundaries of Judah's allotment, the specific details of God's promise to each tribe. The Holy Spirit felt it necessary to write down these words for our own instruction, to build our faith, and to give us insight into spiritual portions, inheritances, and boundaries.

Now our culture uses the term "boundaries" today to help individuals build and maintain healthy relationships—or protect themselves from unhealthy ones. These are not the kinds of boundaries we are talking about, though it is tempting AND foolish to make this passage about that. **At the same time, these geographic boundaries should help us understand the responsibilities and restrictions for where God has given us to live and minister FOR all that we have and all that we don't have is from God.**

Judah's God-given Boundaries

The first 12 verses describe the boundaries surrounding Judah, ending with a definitive: **This is the boundary around the people of Judah according to their clans.** Once again we are reminded that not only are the portions given by God, but their exact shape and size is determined by God. In other words, we're not talking about boundaries in our lives that **YOU or I** need to put up or remove in order to live responsibly. **We are talking about the different BOUNDARIES that God has laid out so that there is no mystery about we're responsible for and what we're not.** The truth is God has placed us in a time, a place, given us a personality, a family history, a set of experiences, perhaps a marriage, a job, different relationships, a neighborhood, and a church community. And within these boundaries we all have certain responsibilities—and if you don't know where they are, you often end up hurting or getting hurt.

Inside JUDAH'S Boundaries

Consider Judah. Judah is given a chunk of land, outlined by God in detail. And within these boundaries, Judah is responsible to **build, to provide, and to protect.** If any aspect of the land is threatened or in need, the men and women of Judah have a mandated responsibility to lead and fight within their borders. They will function as Kings, constantly surveying the health of the land within the borders, the vulnerability of the land, the needs of the land, as they continue to cultivate the land. Beginning with verse 21 to the end, we read that there are not only regions that are given, but different cities. And it can be safely assumed that different clans probably possessed different cities, and thus took responsibility for even a smaller portion of the land. As the boundaries became more precise, then specific men were responsible for a more specific portion. **And as a whole, the tribe of Judah was NOT commanded to concern themselves with another tribe's land. They were NOT commanded to increase the size of their land. They were NOT commanded to cultivate the parts of their own land that were easiest.** God marked

out territory for them to LIVE in only and fully. Of course, as history demonstrates, that did not mean they didn't help one another and cross borders. When all of Israel was threatened, then they all fought together. But primary and, most often, exclusive concern was for what God had told them to care for. It didn't make problems in other tribes unimportant, only their own primary.

Inside OUR Boundaries

So what does that mean for us? In a similar way, God has given us not only a unique portion, he has also given us specific boundaries for those portions. HE has marked out where the extent of our responsibility begins and ends. And it is within these boundaries that we are commanded to LIVE in primarily and fully. Genesis 2.15 says **¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.** And earlier in Genesis we read that the garden has very specific boundaries. And it is within those boundaries, Adam was expected to work, maintain, and grow. **The question for all of us is, have we every stopped to survey the boundaries that God has given us?**

1. **WHAT are your God-given BORDERS?** *And how are you determining that? Judah began with God's Word. He didn't begin with what he saw that he liked. And I believe it is safe to assume, if there was ever any confusion, they went back to what was written.*
2. **What have you been given to BUILD?** *And once you know where borders are, have you ever surveyed what is within it? What healthy structures exist and what is needed?*
3. **Where, within your borders, are the THREATS? What have you been given to PROTECT?** *Knowing what to protect means knowing what is vulnerable? Where are the weak spots? What areas of the portion God has assigned you need more attention, time, energy, and troops to fight?*
4. **Who has been placed in your CARE? What or who needs CULTIVATION?** *What relationships has God made you responsible for? What family? What friends? What neighbors? What co-workers? What community members?*
5. **Where, within your borders, do you need to BATTLE?** *Do you have a strategy at all? Is there a battle plan to develop the portion that you have been given? Do you know what things you can let go, and what things have to be addressed immediately?*

****There is a danger in talking about boundaries like this because we tend to become too OTHER ORIENTED.** Even within our borders, we can wrongly adopt a savior complex and ignore the need for our own savior. Knowing your boundaries is important. But securing the boundaries of the land begins with your relationship with God. And while there are things you must do, and people you must care for, God wants you to deal with your own idolatry and sin BEFORE you worry about anyone else's.

Outside our Boundaries

Let's talk about what is outside our boundaries. As the boundaries of the inheritance are outlined, not only does JUDAH learn what their LAND IS, they also learn WHAT IT IS NOT. **God's borders are not only given so that we know where, what, and who we are responsible for. They are ALSO given so that we know where, what, and who we are NOT responsible for.** Some of us have convinced ourselves that we're Jesus. And like Jesus, we believe it is your responsibility to step in and fight other's battles. This includes "helping" people see their sin by rebuking them at every opportunity (or criticizing them in front of others), "teaching" people what they should do with their lives (though they are not asking and your own is a mess), and "protecting" people by policing their behavior. **Do you know where your borders are?**

1. *What is OUTSIDE your God-given BORDERS?*
2. *How much time and energy are you dedicating to BUILDING something God never told you to take ownership of? How has that project distracted you from your own home becoming dilapidated?*

3. *What is NOT your responsibility to PROTECT?*
4. *What is THREATENED but not your job to save?*
5. *Who are you trying to “save” that God has not placed in your CARE? Who have you convinced yourself desperately needs your help?*
6. *What NEEDS do you have opportunity but NOT responsibility to meet? Why do you assume you are expected to meet that? Could it possibly hinder whoever is truly responsible from doing it?*
7. *Where are the BATTLES that you have NOT been called to fight?*

If you don't know where your God-given boundaries are, **then it is likely we will make our own.** Man-made boundaries are when we deny **GOD'S description of our responsibilities and create OUR OWN generated from our own emotions, intellect, or experience.** The problem is that man-made boundaries are always in the wrong places. We do this by: **BUILDING My Own Boundaries:** Sometimes boundaries start in the wrong place because we never actually listened to God when he read the land survey. This may be naïveté or ignorance. **MOVING God's Boundaries:** Other times we are listening and we do learn exactly where the boundaries are—we just don't like them. When we don't like them, we move them. **ADOPTING Other People's Boundaries:** Most often, men and women know where the boundaries are for their lives but it's simply much easier to focus on other people's land. They dismiss their own God given responsibilities and instead focus on the needs of others.

Conclusion V. 14-20 Caleb's Borders

All that we have and all that we don't have is from God. We are tempted toward discontentment—we are not satisfied with what God has given us. To that point, we'll conclude by taking a look at Caleb and his daughter, in how they dealt with the borders of their inheritance. In verse 14, After receiving his portion, Caleb proves to waste no time clearing the hills surrounding Hebron. ¹⁴ *And Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak, Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmi, the descendants of Anak.* ¹⁵ *And he went up from there against the inhabitants of Debir. Now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher.* ¹⁶ *And Caleb said, “Whoever strikes Kiriath-sepher and captures it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife.”* ¹⁷ *And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, captured it. And he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife.*

Caleb

After having been given his portion, 85 year old Caleb wastes no time in securing his land. He isn't lazy and doesn't make excuses claiming it is too hard. Again, he sets the standard for all tribes to follow WITHIN their BOUNDARIES. Then there is small insertion about one of the cities, DEBIR, within Caleb's portion. Debir had been once conquered and held by Joshua, but it appears to have been retaken by the Canaanites. Caleb offers the hand of his daughter in marriage to the man who conquers the city of Debir. Caleb's nephew, Othneil, who will one day save Israel as the first judge (Judges 3.7-11), captures the city. His daughter Achsah is given to Othneil, and taken to her new home having been blessed with a gift of land as part of the marriage.

Daughter's Request

There are a lot of little lessons to learn from this passage, namely, find a stud just like you for your daughter to marry. I'd like to focus on the request his daughter makes in connection with the borders that you have. As I said, a lot of people are simply dissatisfied with their borders—for whatever reason they are not fulfilled so they either build new borders, move theirs, or adopt others. Caleb's daughter is not satisfied with her inheritance. ¹⁸ *When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she got off her donkey, and Caleb said to her, “What do you want?”* ¹⁹ *She said to him, “Give me a*

blessing. Since you have given me the land of the Negeb, give me also springs of water.” And he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. The land she is given is dry—undesirable. So, she reverently asks for her bather to extend her borders. But she does not ask for her borders to be increased that she might have more, rather, that what she has becomes more satisfying. She asks for water. In other words, she doesn’t just ask for “different borders.” She asks to increase her borders simply so that she can have LIFE for the borders she has given. She ask for means by which to bring the borders she has been given to life.

If the land within your borders, don’t fight for different borders or run from the portion you have. Ask the Father for renewed life. That life comes through Christ. John 4.13-14 ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Benediction

Psalm 16.5-6

- ⁵ The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
- ⁶ The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.