

We will serve the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] Now let's turn in the passage we read to verses 14 and 15. Joshua chapter 24 from verse 14.

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worship beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord.

But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living.

But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. In these words we have what may be called the farewell speech of Joshua to the people of Israel.

I'm not sure how long it was after he spoke these words that he died. It could have been some considerable time. But at any rate, this is the last recorded public speech of Joshua as the leader of the people of Israel.

[1 : 1 7] And so in that sense, it's his last words of advice to them. And just as this morning we were thinking about a very challenging sermon delivered by Peter on the day of Pentecost, so this is a very challenging address by Joshua.

Now, of course, there's quite a lot going on here that perhaps is not immediately apparent to us. For instance, we notice later on in the chapter that there, that day, Joshua was renewing the covenant.

In other words, the covenant that God had made with Israel at Mount Sinai, this was being now confirmed by yet another generation of people who are now in the Promised Land.

But it's particularly the words of Joshua, as he comes to the end of the narrative that he has just given of how God had led the people of Israel into the Promised Land.

It's on Joshua's own words that I'd like to focus as he directs this very clear challenge to the people of Israel.

[2 : 3 3] First of all, there is very obviously a challenge to choose. They are definitely being confronted with a choice.

A choice has to be made. And it's interesting to see how in the Old Testament, just as much as in the New, there is this emphasis upon the choice that requires to be made concerning the life you're going to live.

After all, just think what kind of address Joshua could have made to the people of Israel.

There he was, the leader, the successor to Moses, and he had had the responsibility of leading them into the land of Canaan, of being a military general, and also giving them guidance about countless other matters.

He could have, in his farewell speech, been emphasizing something about the political structure that would need to be set up in the land of Israel.

[3 : 4 6] He perhaps could have said something about the agricultural policy that would have had to be followed. He could have said something about the social customs.

But he chose not to emphasize any of those things. All of those things were important. And you'll all find, you'll find some emphasis upon them in the law of God.

But Joshua focused upon the very central issue that would affect all of these other areas. And that is, he focused upon the choice that lay before them.

A choice as to who they were going to serve. The question is, who is your God? Who do you serve?

Who do you live for? Who do you worship? And he put it in very blunt terms to them. He said there was a choice between serving the Lord Jehovah, the one who had done all these things that he had just recounted.

[4 : 52] Who had brought Abraham, first of all, out of heathendom. First to wander in that promised land, the land that he promised that he would give to his descendants.

Describe how then, when the children of Israel were brought down to Egypt, how God delivered them out of there. brought them back eventually to this land promised to Abraham.

All this has been described. And Joshua is saying, there's a choice between following this God or serving some other kind of God.

And he lists some of those other gods. And we'll look at some of what's involved in that in a minute. But first, we just need to notice this. That he emphasized that there was a choice that had to be made.

A few years ago, Bob Dylan reminded us that you're going to have to serve somebody in his words. It may be the devil, it may be the Lord, but you're going to have to serve somebody.

[6 : 02] Now, of course, that is an emphasis that perhaps is not very palatable today. Because everybody wants to feel that they're not really serving anybody else.

At best, they would like to think that they're living a life where they're their own boss. But the word of God emphasizes very clearly that you're going to have to serve somebody.

Jesus put it like this. You can't serve two masters. You're either hate the one, love the other.

There's a choice to be made. And that choice runs throughout the whole of Scripture. It's there in the New Testament with Jesus talking about two different ways.

It's here in the Old Testament with Joshua talking about two different kinds of gods. And we all in one way or another serve those different gods.

[7 : 10] The question to put it in our terms today that Joshua was asking, that Joshua was putting to them is this. Whom do you serve? What do you live for?

What is your God? Now that question can be answered by the kind of thing that you consider to be really important. What's really number one in your life?

What takes precedence over anything else? And if you can answer that question honestly, then you'll discover what is your God.

Joshua next challenged them to consistent commitment. Again in verse 14. Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness.

Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord. It wasn't just stating that there was a choice, that there were two different ways to be followed.

[8 : 22] But he emphasized quite clearly that he was urging them to follow one particular way and he was urging them to be consistently committed to that way.

And again, isn't this the whole thrust of scripture? Nowhere does it leave us with the impression that it's a matter of indifference as to what kind of life we're going to live.

Nor does it leave us with the impression that we can be kind of half-hearted about this choice that has to be made. Joshua challenged them to a consistent commitment to worshipping and serving God.

Notice the emphasis he puts here upon serving. fear the Lord and serve him. And then that's repeated again at the end of the verse and serve the Lord.

The person who sees quite clearly the choice that is laid before us by scripture between two ways serving the Lord or serving sin.

[9 : 36] that person who then is challenged to serve the Lord recognizes that he is being asked to commit himself wholeheartedly to this master.

because God does not want just our time or a part of our time. He doesn't want just our money or a part of our money.

He doesn't just want our interest or a part of our interest. God wants us and he wants us wholeheartedly.

the command which is right there in the Old Testament repeated by Jesus in the New is love to the Lord your God all your heart all your soul all your strength.

These different ways emphasizing the wholeheartedness of this commitment that is desired. Now Joshua here right at the end of his life or very near the end of his life was challenging people with that kind of commitment.

[10 : 53] He was saying to them it's not just enough that you see the various choices that are before you but you need to be confronted with this choice to serve God and to serve him wholeheartedly.

It's not enough for you to give lip service to the worship of God. Not to just go through the ritual and to go through the outward form of the worship.

You need to fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. You need to be true and absolutely sincere and wholehearted in this service of God.

So he was asking the people to realize that what God was demanding was a consistent commitment. not something that could be shared with other gods, some kind of amalgam of the different religions of the day.

Not something that could be kind of temporary that they could serve God some of the time and then serve other gods another part of the time. But a wholehearted commitment.

[12 : 19] Now again, this is the whole challenge of God's word to us today. God is challenging us to be wholeheartedly committed to Him. You see, there are plenty of so-called half-hearted Christians in the world, what we call nominal Christians.

Among other things, that's something that this recent church census has shown up. But it's there throughout the world, not just in this country. People who are nominally Christian, yet, their actual beliefs concerning Jesus Christ and their actual practice, their actual lifestyle, doesn't bear comparison with what Jesus said is required of someone who follows Him.

We've got plenty of nominal Christians and enough nominal Christianity to sicken the whole world of it. what's required of us is not that kind of nominal half-hearted Christianity, but a whole-hearted commitment to God and to His way to say that we will serve Him.

Serve Him. That means that it's not just a matter of having a service of worship like we're doing just now, or just any kind of outward ceremony or form.

What is required for someone to serve is that he be a servant. A servant. Someone who recognizes that he is a master who is to be pleased, who is to be worked for in everything.

[14 : 11] that's what God is asking of us. He's asking us to commit our lives to Him and to be consistently committed to Him.

Because, as we've seen already, we cannot share that service with someone else or some other kind of God. so then again, Joshua challenges the people then, and through his words being recorded in Scripture, he challenges us still today.

But then also, he challenges us to have the courage of our convictions. This is particularly in verse 15. But, if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living.

Joshua issues a very clear challenge. He knew there would be people who would be, perhaps, a little disgruntled, perhaps a little dissatisfied, all those people like that.

Moses had seen plenty of it, and remember, Joshua had been there all along with Moses as a servant. Joshua had seen all the kind of rebelliousness and grumbling of the people of Israel through those 40 years in the wilderness.

[15 : 53] And so, he was issuing a challenge. He was saying, all right, if there's anyone here who's dissatisfied, if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, if the demands of God's work seem too heavy, too strict, then, choose whom you will serve.

Choose your God, who you're going to work for, who you're going to worship, who you're going to live for. He issued that challenge very much in the terms of his day.

He talked of three different possibilities. He said, well, there's the possibility of going back to the gods that Abraham's ancestors worshipped in Mesopotamia in the East.

There's the possibility of going back to the gods that you knew in Egypt, that the people of Egypt worshipped. Or, there's the possibility of worshipping the gods there around you in the land of Canaan.

There's a choice, a wide enough choice for anyone. Which of these gods will you serve? So, he was issuing a very distinct challenge for them to find some god that was worth living for, worth serving.

[17 : 20] God. When it's put like that, we begin to see very clearly what he was saying. All that we know of those gods of the ancient world is hideous and grotesque.

In various ways, those gods purported to represent aspects of nature or aspects of human society, kind of personalized processes of nature or of human society.

And yet, in their name was done all kinds of grotesque and immoral things. The worst, of course, being in the Canaanite religion the sacrifice of human beings, the sacrifice of even children.

This kind of thing was part and parcel of the worship of that time. And of course, there was a whole absolute foolishness involved in it all along, of people bowing down and worshipping some kind of visible representation of those gods, like the people of Israel did when Moses was at Mount Simon.

And they wondered what had happened to him, and they wanted to go back to Egypt, back to the gods of Egypt, and so they made the golden calf, which they bowed down and worshipped.

[18 : 50] The absolute foolishness and stupidity of people falling down and worshipping something that their own hands have made. But is it any less or any more foolish than the foolishness of our world today, that lives for, and worships, and adores, very things that our hands have made, all the consumer goods that we can have, and yet there's something that people have made.

So obviously, whatever we are, we are superior to these things, and we have no explanation of our superiority, because we are rejecting the only truth that can give an explanation, that we are made in the image of God, the God who created us to have that kind of creativity, that kind of God-likeness.

Joshua was issuing a challenge, and saying to them, go on, look around you, in the world about you, look back in history, look back to the gods that Abraham left, look to the land of Egypt, whose gods were demonstrated to be no gods, when the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea, and all the power of Egypt lay in ruin, or Jews, the gods of Canaan, the gods who could not withstand the God of Israel.

Go to those gods, and see if you can find a substitute, a replacement, or something that is better than the Lord Jehovah.

Now, Joshua issues that challenge in a very striking, blunt way, and that kind of challenge still needs to be issued today, because, of course, we know that still today, there are people to whom following what the teaching of the Bible says is undesirable.

[20 : 47] There are so many things in it they say that they cannot accept. So many things in it that we modern people today feel that we have grown, we don't need a lot of this old-fashioned stuff.

well, find some other God. Find some God that is better, some God that can compete, some God that can even compare with this God, with this God who has demonstrated to us the only explanation that there is of what we are as human beings, the God who has demonstrated to us the only hope that there can be for us as human beings, the God who has demonstrated his love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ, his own son, died for us.

The challenge still needs to be issued today, to see if there is indeed any philosophy or any religion that compares with this religion.

and so we need today to have the courage of our convictions. If we are indeed committed to the Christian faith, then let us be wholeheartedly committed to it.

Let us search the scriptures and find the answers for the problems that confront us in the contemporary situation. Christian faith, but if we are dissatisfied with him, if serving God seems undesirable, then find something else and consistently follow it, and see how far you get.

[22 : 34] That is the challenge of God's word still to us today. Then finally, there is a challenge of a personal example at the end of verse 15.

But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Now, I don't think those words were spoken with any kind of verbatim.

They were spoken quietly, sincerely, strongly, yet they were spoken necessarily because it needed to be emphasized that whatever anybody else did, Joshua was absolutely wholly committed to following God.

Now, this stands in marked contrast to the kind of atmosphere in which we live today. Joshua's kind of language today would be viewed as being kind of quaint or intolerant for some such thing, someone being really too opinionated.

But Joshua's kind of language is the kind of language that we need. In an age when there is so much confusion, in an age when there are so many gods, so many idols, and so many different ideas, we need a clear Christian voice, that voice speaking of a clear commitment.

[24 : 22] What our world today needs is not more woolly-minded Christians, less clear doctrine, but absolutely the reverse.

world today needs Christian clarity. The world needs to know what the Christian gospel is and where we stand.

And it needs above all to see people who are wholly committed to Jesus Christ and who are going to follow him no matter what the cost. That is what Joshua is saying here.

He's saying, well, I've made the choice before you. I've urged you to choose to follow the Lord. But whatever you are going to do, as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

And that is the kind of commitment required of Christian men and Christian families today. and perhaps it is in that area that we can concentrate for a minute because it's in that area that we need so much Christian commitment.

[25 : 41] Christian men, I emphasize, because the challenge of God's word in this regard is particular to those who are or will be heads of families, heads of households.

what kind of family have you got? What kind of family are you going to have? What kind of household is it going to be?

Is your decision, your choice, your commitment so clear that whatever is going to happen, whatever way society is going to go, whatever people around you are going to do, your choice is clear.

as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. That is the kind of commitment required, and particularly at this level, this family or household level, because surely as we know, that is where character is formed, that is where the next generation is given its basis.

And if there is not that commitment at that family level, then indeed there is little hope for future generations. What is demanded of the Christian father, the Christian husband, is to be a leader in that situation and to establish Christian standards of worship of God, of reading God's word, of applying the ethics of Christianity in everyday situations.

[27 : 18] Christians. I don't mean to say that we should suddenly think that we're going to be perfect in all of these areas, but that is the challenge that we are committed to if we are Christians, to seek to apply those principles in our day-to-day within.

And we need to do so against all the pressures and the oppositions that there may be. It's not easy. it is never promised to be easy in God's word.

We should never think that simply because we're Christians, then everything will just fall into place. That is a wrong and misguided and unbiblical idea.

Just because you're a Christian, just because you profess faith in Christ, everything isn't going to fall into place for you. You're going to have to strive and go on striving.

you're going to have to serve and go on serving. You're going to have to apply in the hard decisions of life the principles of God's word.

[28 : 28] And you're going to have to take the laws. You're going to have to take the opposition if you're going to stand for Christian principles. I need to do that outside and inside the home and the family.

this is the challenge that is issued here by Joshua as he refers to his own decision. And he's doing this for a particular purpose.

He is challenging them with his own decision, his own stance. Not in any kind of egocentric way, drawing attention to himself and pretending that he's better than anybody else.

But he's saying quite quietly, quite calmly, you do as you please. I am going to follow the Lord. Again, that kind of Christian witness is required.

Just think of the impact of that statement of Joshua's upon the Israelites there. Because this statement of Joshua's was not something just recently arrived at.

[29 : 41] It was not some whim, it was not some just emotional statement on the spur of the moment. The people there knew Joshua. And they knew that what he said here was the expression of a lifetime commitment.

Joshua's choice was not made that day as he was renewing the covenant there for Israel. Joshua's choice was made a long, long time before that.

A choice when he chose to serve God and to stand alongside Moses. And a choice made time and time again when in difficulty and against opposition he had to stand with Moses and the word of God.

A time when only he and Cainan stood against the ten other spies that had been sent into the land of Canaan. They all brought back the same report that it was a wonderful, beautiful land but the ten said we can't go up there.

They're too fierce, they're too powerful. Only Joshua and Cainan stood and said the Lord can give us that land.

[31 : 03] time and time again Joshua stood on the basis of that choice that he had made, that God was reliable, that God's word was true, what God had promised he would do.

And so the choice spoken that day was in the whole context of the existential living of Joshua, day by day, week after week.

Yes, there would have been mistakes. Yes, it would have been obvious that Joshua was only a mere man, fallible, prone to error and sin, yet there would be evidence also of a consistent choice, following on through all the difficulties and the ups and downs, from the example of his own life and his own family, demonstrating that they were standing together on the basis of what God had promised his word.

That is something that the world badly needs to hear today. There's so much change, so much variety in the world in which we live today.

Of course, variety is a good thing and change is a good thing if it's changing from something that's bad to something that's good. But there's so much variation and fluctuation, people flitting from one thing to the next, people getting all hit up about one particular thing one week, then the next week, don't hear anymore about it, they're on to something else.

[32 : 39] Of course, this is something that's very much encouraged by the kind of communications we have today, like television and so on. Interest is focused upon one particular thing one day, then that vanishes and it's something else.

We have plenty of this kind of flitting from one thing to another, plenty of that kind of variety and we need something of this consistent standing for the one God, standing for the one Master, living day after day, week after week, knowing where we have placed our trust, knowing to whom we have committed our lives, knowing that we have persuaded that he is able to keep his promises and he is able to fulfill all that he has said he will do for us through Jesus' hearts.

This is the kind of commitment that Joshua had, the kind of commitment he challenges us to have today, a day when we needed awesome, a day when our world was, a day when our world most definitely needs consistent Christian living that challenges all the shallowness of this age in which we live, that challenges the fickleness of the world about us, that challenges to make people think, who is the God that we serve, who is this God who stays with us through thick and thin, and whom we are prepared to stay with, through thick and thin, come what may.

Joshua says, as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Let us also join with him in making that same statement, come what may.

Let us pray. our gracious Lord, we bless you that you have revealed to us what we need to know concerning yourself, just as those Israelites knew that day the God of whom Joshua spoke, so we know because your word reveals the kind of God you are, what you have done, what you have accomplished in the history of this world, what you have accomplished particularly in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[35 : 17] We bless you that you have so revealed yourself so that none can say, I don't know, none can say, we don't know what kind of being God is.

Lord, we pray that you might challenge us by your own word, by that word be applied to us by your spirit, to turn us from our foolishness, to turn us from our half-heartedness, to turn us to serve the living God completely and fully.

Gracious Lord, we pray that you would be with us in the coming days as we seek more and more, day by day, inch by inch, to continue this fight, to fight the good fight of faith, upon which all those who trust in Jesus have started.

We pray for those who as yet have not even started on that journey. Lord, may the challenge of your word also be a help to them, to draw them to yourself.

We ask these things in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 41] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Hey, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.