

# Joshua 24

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Date: 17 May 2015

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn to the second passage that we read in the book of Joshua, in Joshua chapter 24. And I want to spend a little time giving thought to the words that are, without doubt, the most memorable that we find in this particular chapter.

But before we turn to the words that we want to think about, let's just introduce what we have to say in a somewhat different manner. It's not all about you.

I wonder if those words have ever been addressed to you. Certainly in our own family, it's not unusual. And I won't reveal who says those words to whom, how many of us are the recipients of that particular admonishment.

But nonetheless, these are words that we do hear that are said, and perhaps they've been said to you. It's not all about you. I think most of us would give our formal assent to the reality that the universe does not revolve around us.

Possibly the solar system, but not the whole universe. We recognize that that is true. We would all, I hope, be willing to state with some conviction.

[ 1 : 24 ] It's not all about me. And yet I wonder if behind that, behind what we might formally acknowledge, there remains the unspoken, perhaps even unacknowledged reality that actually it is all about me.

Or in any case, it's mostly about me. We do live in a very individualistic society. The individual is king.

And we are all quick to assert and defend our individual rights as men and women. And it's sobering to see how that individualistic philosophy increasingly underpins much of our public morality as a nation.

If we just think of one example in matters concerning the sanctity of life, personal autonomy has become the key factor.

At the beginning of life, a woman's right to choose has precedence over an unborn child's right to life. And at the end of life, those who would agitate for legalizing assisted suicide or euthanasia gather under the banner of a very telling slogan.

[ 2 : 49 ] You may have seen it on news reports. My life, my death, my choice. If they were looking for something more catchy, they might have opted for me, me, me.

Does God have a view on the matter? Is it all about me? Is it all about you? Or is it all about us? Or is it all about the other guy?

What about love your neighbor and all that good stuff that we hear about and read about? Or is it perhaps, as it says here on the cover of Compass, I was just having a glance at this the other day, and notice that it has as its subtitle, I guess, it's all about Jesus.

Is that what it's all about? It's all about Jesus. So many questions and so little time. I want to consider a statement made by Joshua recorded for us in chapter 24 of the book that bears his name.

But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. I think as we consider these words of testimony of this particular servant of God, we can ponder on and reflect on some of the matters that we've already aired in our words of introduction.

[ 4 : 14 ] But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Now some of you may recall that we considered this chapter on a previous occasion, I don't know, maybe a couple of years ago, and made some mention of these words of Joshua.

But on that occasion, we did so in a very fleeting manner. This morning, I want to focus very decidedly on these words, and do so both in the context of the issues that we've just been commenting on, and with reference to the sacrament of baptism that we will be administering this morning.

We'll divide the statement of Joshua in three parts, and give to each part a title that echoes something of the questions that we were posing a moment ago.

So the three titles that we've selected are as follows. First of all, it is about me. And all will become clear in due course.

Well, it may not all become clear, but I would hope that all would become clear. The first title is that, it is about me. The second title is, it's not all about me. And the third title is, it is all about him.

[ 5 : 28 ] Maybe you can try and work out what part of what Joshua says in these stirring words of testimony correspond to each of our titles. Well, let's proceed and think of each in turn, and see if all does become clear.

So the first title that we're adopting to examine one part of what Joshua says is this, it is about me. You see, Joshua begins his stirring words of confession with four telling words.

He says, but as for me, as for me. He's talking about himself. He's talking about Joshua. There were many thousands gathered there on the plains of Shechem, but he says, as for me.

And with these words, he makes it very clear that what he is declaring is a personal decision of Joshua, that he is taking.

As for me, they are words that speak of personal decision. He recognizes that though he is part of a community or a people, there is a place for and indeed a demand upon him to take a personal decision.

[ 6 : 41 ] And I want us to just think briefly about three aspects of this personal decision of Joshua. Notice how it is a grateful decision, a renewed decision, and an unwavering decision.

Three characteristics of this personal decision of Joshua that is evidenced by the manner in which he begins what he has to say. But as for me, first of all then, it's a grateful decision.

Joshua's decision to serve the Lord is grounded in gratitude. It is grounded in his gratitude for what God has done in the past on behalf of his people, and grounded in what God is doing in the present on behalf of his people.

And, of course, as one of God's people on behalf of Joshua. Now, the whole chapter really gives us the evidence that that is indeed the ground, the foundation of Joshua's decision.

We didn't read the whole chapter for reasons of time, But just to explain, these words that we're focusing our attention on are words that are made in the context of a ceremony of covenant renewal.

[ 8 : 05 ] The people of Israel were looking back to all that God had done in their favor through the generations. Notice where Joshua begins as he gathers the people and addresses them.

There in verse 2, And from Abraham, the story continues.

And again, if we were to read the chapter, we would see how Joshua develops the story. The story continues from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, the descent into Egypt.

And all of this, of course, centuries before Joshua saw the light of day. But these events, though long ago, to use the very words of Joshua, served as testimony to God's faithfulness.

And so was a cause for gratitude for Joshua and indeed for the people. But then Joshua continues and relates the story of God's gracious salvation as an eyewitness and as a participant.

[ 9 : 35 ] He speaks of their redemption from slavery in Egypt and their deliverance into the promised land where they are now. This ceremony of covenant renewal, it would seem, took place some 20 or 30 years following the taking possession of the promised land.

And so Joshua and the people look back. They look back to long ago. But they also look back to their own life history and God's gracious dealings with them.

Why does Joshua decide to serve the Lord? Well, his decision is grounded in gratitude for all that God had done. And all that God continued to do in favor of his people.

Well, we're reading about events that took place long ago as we stand here this morning. But in so many regards, the spiritual principles that we find remain the same.

Nothing has changed. Will you serve the Lord? Joshua declares this personal decision to serve the Lord. Well, what about you? Will you serve the Lord?

[ 10 : 49 ] And as you ponder on what answer you give to that question, what you need to do is you need to consider all that he has done in the past. You have to consider, yes, even all that Joshua records in these pages of the Bible as part of God's people.

We look back, and this is our history. But we also consider, as we look back from a different standpoint, from a different point in history, as we look back to God's supreme act of redemptive love, the giving of his own son, Jesus, to be our Savior.

We look back to that great act of love, of self-giving love on the part of the Father, the giving of his own son to die for us, hopeless sinners.

And so we recognize with gratitude his great love for us. And that is the grounds for our decision to serve him.

But we also ponder on and consider all that he continues to do for us, even to this very day. And as we do, can we respond in any other way?

[ 12 : 05 ] A personal decision grounded in gratitude, but a personal decision also that we can describe as a renewed decision.

If we were only privy to this statement of Joshua, this declaration of Joshua in isolation, if we knew nothing of what was round about it, of what comes before, if all we had were these words, but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord, we might imagine that these words mark the beginning of a commitment on the part of Joshua.

This might appear to be Joshua, for the first time, declaring, well, this is what I'm going to do. This is where I begin my service for the Lord.

But of course, we know that that is not what is happening. We know that Joshua has been serving the Lord for a lifetime. Certainly half a century, if not more, as we do the maths.

He's an old man who has faithfully served the Lord year after year, decade after decade, in good times and bad, and yet there is ever the need to renew his decision, to renew his commitment, even as in the case of Joshua, death beckoned.

[ 13 : 38 ] This opportunity for renewal that formed an integral part of the covenant established by God with his people highlights two fundamental realities.

It highlights the patience of God and the perseverance of faith. God provides an opportunity for renewal and rededication. He doesn't discard those who have failed or stumbled or fallen.

Rather, he invites them. He invites us back to himself, that we would renew again our commitment to his service. The very ceremony reminds us of the patience of God, but it also reminds us of this call to perseverance, the perseverance of faith, to a faith that keeps on believing, a faith that keeps on serving, a faith that keeps on keeping on, fighting the good fight, running the good race to the very end.

What about you? Is it necessary for you? Is this an opportunity for you to renew your commitment to serve the Lord?

You can look back, perhaps, on a life of service and thank God for that. But might it be necessary for you, for me, to renew our commitment to the service of God?

[ 15 : 11 ] A decision grounded in gratitude, a grateful decision, a renewed decision, but another characteristic that is very apparent in the language that Joshua uses is that this is an unwavering decision.

The words Joshua chooses are eloquent in their brevity and simplicity. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

Others may and others will refuse to serve the Lord. Others may and others will throw in the towel in the face of difficulty and opposition. Others may and others will be seduced by other gods and the pleasures that this world has to offer, but not Joshua.

He will turn neither to the right nor to the left. He will not look back wistfully to Egypt, nor will he look round about him longingly to what the gods of his neighbors have to offer.

No, this is an unwavering decision on the part of this man of God. It is about me. It was about me. It was about Joshua.

[ 16 : 20 ] It was necessary for Joshua to take this personal decision. But as for me, as for me, others will do what they decide to do.

But as for me, I will serve the Lord. The second title that I gave that I hope captures in some measure the statement of Joshua was, it's not just about me.

It is about me, but it's not just about me. Joshua begins with the words, but as for me. But he continues, but as for me and my household.

But as for me and my household. His decision was, as we've already stated, as the language allows us to state with great confidence, it was a personal decision.

But it was not only a personal decision, it was also a representative decision. Joshua decides on behalf of others. Who does he decide on behalf of?

[ 17 : 27 ] Or who does he presume to represent? Well, let's start by noting who he does not claim to represent or decide on behalf of. He's not speaking on behalf of all the people gathered at this ceremony of covenant renewal.

He does not presume to represent every household gathered at Shechem on that solemn day. He was, in some ways, in a very real way, one who represented the people.

But in this matter of a decision to serve the Lord, he very clearly and explicitly makes it evident that he is not claiming or presuming to represent everybody there.

He explicitly distinguishes between himself and others. Joshua acknowledged that others must decide for themselves. He can't do that for them. Well, who then does he represent or decide on behalf of?

Well, he tells us himself. But as for me and my household, my household. Now, what does that mean? His household, as he would have used that word and as it would have been understood by those who were listening to him, his household would have included, certainly, his immediate family, his wife and children, certainly his dependent children, though even that word dependent, the way in which we would understand it today, would be very different from perhaps the way it would have been understood in Joshua's day.

[ 19 : 02 ] But recognizing the limitation of the word, nonetheless, we might use it. His household might even extend to his grandchildren and servants that depended on Joshua.

Perhaps to use a contemporary expression that I think in a measure captures the picture, we could say that his household included all under his roof.

All those under his roof, all those who were dependent on him, all those over whom he exercised headship or leadership as the head of the home or the household.

I wonder what do you make of that? What do you make of Joshua presuming to decide on behalf of others? Was Joshua presumptuous in this decision that he makes on behalf of others?

Would he have been better advised to declare along these lines? But as for me, I will serve the Lord, and then, by all means, urge and encourage family members to do likewise.

[ 20 : 11 ] Would that not have been a better approach? Could they, the other members of his household, should they indeed not have decided for themselves?

Was this the act of a tyrannical patriarch, imposing his own personal faith on others? We know in our own day we have the more extreme fringe of militant secularists who would see a Christian family raising their children in the faith.

as an act of child abuse, of brainwashing. That is what we're accused of. Let them decide for themselves in due course if they want to believe such superstitions.

Well, what about Joshua and the decision that he takes on behalf of others? In a sense, to even ask these questions is to betray an ignorance of the place of the household or family in God's saving purposes.

It's also to ignore the place in God's purposes of the one who exercises spiritual headship and authority in the home. If we go back to the very beginning of the covenant that is being renewed on this very occasion here in Joshua, the call of Abraham, we find this principle of spiritual headship or representation.

[ 21 : 37 ] God's covenant was with Abraham and his household. And Abraham was required to take the decision to commit to the Lord on behalf of his household.

And that is what he did. He did so as instructed by God by applying the sign of the covenant established, circumcision, to the members of his household.

As we've read in Genesis chapter 17, time doesn't allow us to go back and revisit it more carefully. Of course, at the beginning, when God calls Abraham, there was just one household, the household of Abraham.

But in time, one household became many households. They all part, in one sense, of the one household of Israel. But each head of each household inherited the same onerous responsibility as had been given to Abraham.

And it is this God-established, God-given responsibility that Joshua is here exercising when he declares, but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

[ 22 : 52 ] Well, what about you? Now, this matter, this question, is directed in the first instance to believing fathers. There is a real sense in which spiritual leadership is shared by believing parents.

And of course, where the father is absent or fails to exercise spiritual leadership, then this responsibility falls upon a believing mother.

Are we exercising this spiritual leadership that God has commended to us? But I wonder what you make even of that idea, of that concept.

I wonder if some of us might not be somewhat uncomfortable and respond, well, is this not all just ancient history? That's the way things were done way back then.

But it has no relevance to the modern world. We live in different times. Indeed, even as Christians, is it not the case that we turn to the New Testament and there find a very different picture?

[ 23 : 56 ] In the New Testament, it's all about the gospel call directed to individuals. It's each sinner for himself, if we can put it somewhat crudely. How often have we been told that God doesn't have grandchildren?

I wonder if you've heard that expression. No grandchildren, no grandsons, just sons, no granddaughters, just daughters. I can almost hear the evangelist declaring with passion and urgency, your granny's faith can't save you and your father's faith can't save you.

You need to believe for yourself. Of course, there is great truth in a measure in that call. But what is it that we actually find in the New Testament?

Well, from Peter's very first sermon on the day of Pentecost, we find that God's promises of salvation remain for you and your household.

Let's just remind ourselves of what Peter says there as he invites his audience to commit to the Lord in Acts chapter 2 and verses 38 and 39.

[ 25 : 01 ] What do we read there? Acts chapter 2, verses 38 and 39. Peter replying, repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the promises for you and your children and for all who are fought off, for all whom the Lord, our God, will call.

And this pattern, God's pattern of working in and through families or households with a particular onus and responsibility upon the spiritual head of the family lies behind and undergirds what we will do this morning when we baptize William.

Now it's not my intention this morning to argue the case for infant baptism and it's certainly true that the case for infant baptism does not rest wholly on this principle or pattern, but it is certainly consistent with it.

We see this in the New Testament, in the conversion of the Philippian jailer. The jailer hears the gospel message. The message itself contains a promise that extends to his household.

[ 26 : 13 ] The jailer believes and in believing embraces and claims the promise of salvation offered not only to himself as an individual but to his household. And so he and his household, we conclude by reasonable deduction, received the New Testament sign of the covenant at baptism.

Now this, of course, this is just one example, but it's not an isolated example. In the New Testament, we find that every person identified as having a household present at his or her conversion had their entire household baptized.

The whole household were involved, became part of this community of faith. When Samuel and Mary bring William to be baptized and declare their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and promise to bring up William in the faith, they are, in effect, echoing the words and convictions of Joshua on the plains of Shechem.

But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Now, of course, it is true that as Will grows into a wee boy and then grows into a big boy and then becomes a teenager and a young man, he will have to take the responsibility to actively acquiesce in the decision of his parents, to own for himself his parents' faith.

That is something that he will need to do. The decision has been taken, but it is a decision that he will have to make his own. Our confidence is in the Lord that he will, by his Spirit, enable William to joyfully echo the convictions and words of his parents.

[ 28 : 05 ] But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Finally, and very briefly, there was a third title that I gave to the statement of Joshua, it's all about him.

It is about me. It's not all about me and it is about him. What does Joshua actually decide to do, both as a personal decision and a representative one?

Well, he decides to serve the Lord. But what does that mean? Who is he deciding to serve and what does that look like? He decides to serve the Lord.

He decides to serve Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, the only living and true God. He decides to serve the one who would, in the fullness of time, make himself more fully known and visible in the person of Jesus Christ, the Lord.

And this is the challenge that we all face. Will you serve the Lord Jesus Christ? What does this service involve? What does it look like?

[ 29 : 12 ] Well, that's a big question, but we limit ourselves this morning to notice a very fascinating and revealing way in which serving the Lord is defined or explained by the use of two verbs employed respectively by Joshua and the people in what follows in the chapter and particularly in verses 23 and 24.

And we'll see as we look at these two verses that this service involves both an internal and an external aspect. It involves both your heart and your hands, if we can put it that way.

Notice what Joshua says in verse 23 as he continues encouraging and urging the people. He says this, Now then, said Joshua, throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord.

He's talking about the people doing what he has done. He has declared his intention, his renewed intention to serve the Lord and he wants the people to do likewise and he explains what that means or one aspect of what that means in this way.

Yield your hearts to the Lord. This is what we might call the internal or invisible aspect of a decision to serve the Lord. It begins in the heart.

[ 30 : 30 ] Our hearts need to be changed and this is a work of God. It is God who renews and recreates, resuscitates our hearts.

Or in the language of Jeremiah, it is God who removes a heart of stone and replaces with a heart of flesh. Yield your hearts to the Lord. But then there's another aspect and it's one that the people pick up on in their response.

Notice what they say in verse 24. And the people said to Joshua, We will serve the Lord our God. But then what do they say? They don't, there isn't a full stop there. We will serve the Lord our God and obey Him.

In effect, what they're saying is this is the manner in which we will serve the Lord. We will obey Him. This is what will be visible in their lives, in their conduct, in how they relate one to another, husbands to wives, and parents to children, in the decisions that they make, in the words that they speak, in the manner that they work and do their business.

They will obey. We will serve the Lord our God and obey Him. See, the people recognize this critical truth. What is in the heart must and will be visible in the lives that we lead.

[ 31 : 48 ] The external or visible aspect of service is obedience. To serve the Lord is to obey the Lord. Listen to how Joshua himself captures the matter in a previous chapter, in chapter 22 and in verse 5.

Again, it's Joshua speaking to the people and he says this, but be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to obey His commands, to hold fast to Him and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul.

So when it comes to our response to the good news, when it comes to your response to the gospel, is it all about me?

Is it all about you? Well, it is about you. It is necessary for you to take a personal decision. It is necessary for you to echo in some form of words, certainly the sentiments, the convictions that we find in the words of Joshua.

But as for me, as for me, in the light of what I know, in the light of God's goodness, in the light of God's love, in the light of what He has done in the person of His Son, Jesus, this is how I respond.

[ 33 : 08 ] This is my personal decision. But as for me, others may choose to do otherwise. But as for me, this is what I am going to do. I will serve the Lord.

You need to take a decision, a personal decision. And indeed, the opportunity and the challenge is to renew that decision. If by God's grace, you can look back to a day when you took that decision.

Maybe you can't look back to a day, but you know that that is what has governed your life. Well, thank God for that. But now there's opportunity to renew that decision. It is about you.

But it's not all about you. In the measure that God has given you spiritual leadership in your home. It's about your family. It's about your household. And then, of course, it is ultimately all about Him.

It's all about the Lord Jesus Christ. It's about a life of grateful and loving service to the Lord of Lords, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[ 34 : 09 ] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning. We thank you for your word. We thank you that you are indeed a God who gives us ample reason to be grateful.

Help us to be a people with a long memory that we would look back in wonder and in grateful awe at all that you have done for us, even from long ago.

We thank you for the Bible that enables us to know and to be reminded of your dealings with us and with your people. But we thank you that we don't only look back to long ago.

We thank you that we can look around to our own day and our own life experience and acknowledge your goodness and your grace towards us. And as we do, we pray that our reasonable response would be of determining, perhaps determining anew, to serve you and to serve you only.

We thank you for the gift of family. We thank you for the responsibility of exercising spiritual leadership. We acknowledge how far short we fall. And we pray that you would help us and instruct us and guide us in the measure that we have such responsibility.

[ 35 : 24 ] And we pray that you would indeed help us to serve you, that our hearts would be changed, that our hearts would be hearts that burn with affection and loyalty for you, and that that would be evidenced and be made visible in lives of serious obedience to you.

And all of these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.