

Time to Make up Your Mind (Joshua 24:15b)

Reading: Joshua 24:14-27

Martha and the family have made that incredibly difficult journey from the Sudan...
finally to Australia.

In a way it is like the journey of the Israelites, as they journeyed from Egypt...
finally into the Promised Land.

The world was opening up to them...a world of promise and opportunity...

But also a world of temptation to wander from a deep trust and dependence on God.

Joshua stands before them and challenges them...keep your eyes on God.

Those words speak to Martha and the family.

Those words of challenge are for each of us.

The end of the book of Joshua the people again renew their commitment to the
Covenant.

It is a covenant that God made first with their forefather Abraham,
then with Isaac and Jacob,
then with their fathers under Moses at Mt Sinai
and again on the borders of Canaan.

This new generation are the ones who are seeing the fulfilment of that covenant...
They were in the Promised Land!

But Joshua wants them to understand that this is not the end of the race.
They were just at the starting line.

This may be the finish of the book.

But really they have been in a race to the starting line.

God has given you the Land...

but you must take it and live in it according to His will for you.

It is fulfilled already, but not yet.

And this idea is played out in the previous chapters, as Joshua sets the boundaries of the
land for the 12 tribes...

But reminds them too that the inhabitants of the land still lived among them,
and still needed to be driven out.

So press on and take the prize God has given you.

In the opening verses of this chapter, Joshua summaries Israel's history.

And it is a history of Exodus.

Exodus means a coming out, an exit.

Israel's history has been a history of leaving.

Of God taking his people out.

It is also a story of God's faithfulness and their unfaithfulness.

In Deuteronomy 7:9 we read, "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands..."

And back in Joshua 21:45 we read, "Not one of all the LORD'S good promises to the house of Israel failed; everyone was fulfilled."

Even though Lord has kept his side of the bargain at every point in the history of salvation, at every point we also find the failure of the human will to do right.

The history of Israel, and the history of Christianity for that matter, is littered with monuments to the failure of human beings to keep covenant with the covenant-keeping God.

‘You are not able to serve the Lord’ says Joshua...and he was right.

The bible teaches the total inability of the human will to do good and be faithful to God.

Even after the miracles of Moses and the Red Sea a generation of Israelites were unfaithful and died in the desert.

And Joshua reminds their children in no uncertain terms that they are not better than their fathers.

Jesus said similar things.

He taught us that we should not trust our human nature.

He knew human nature.

For this reason, Jesus did not seek easy converts.

If you want to be a real Christian, it is not an easy road.

Many think they believe then turn back because it's too hard.

That's why Jesus taught things like what we read in Luke 9.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man

has no place to lay his head." He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Christianity is not for the faint-hearted.

It is not a sprint, but a life-long marathon.

And it will cost you your very soul.

Count the cost.

Are you willing to give up all your idols for Jesus?

There is a decision to make, and to remain in for the rest of your life.

Have you consciously made that decision?

There it is in verses 14 to 16 of Joshua 23.

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness...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 family, we will serve the Lord."

And the people answered Joshua, "We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God!"

Do you know him as your God?

You know what really amazes me about these verses we have read together?

The need to get rid of idols!

These people of God were still carrying idols with them!

They had travelled through years in the desert with God guiding them all the way.

They had witnessed his miracles of food and water every day.

They had finally entered the Promised Land on a path of conquest...

Defeating armies larger and better equipped than them...

Because God went with them and before them.

They had witnessed a god who faithfully kept his promises and brought them to the Promised Land.

Yet here they are...carrying idols...

Not just from Egypt...but beyond the River...Euphrates...

From Mesopotamia where Abraham migrated from.

Doesn't that blow your mind away?

But are you any different?

You know about the awesome power of our God.

You know about his wonderful grace and mercy through Jesus Christ.

You know about his faithful promise keeping.

But we carry our idols around with us.

Now, I'm not talking about idols of wood and stone.

I doubt that anyone here could be found guilty of worshiping or following after false gods in the traditional sense.

But I want to remind you that idolatry is not limited to figures of wood and stone
an idol is anything that causes your focus to shift from complete dedication to God.

Anything that can divert your attention and causes you to pursue after it rather than God alone is an idol and makes you an idolater.

You have a choice of whom or what to serve in your life. Take your pick:

You can serve pleasure. You can live for laughter and wine and beer.

You can live for sex and holidays and weekends.

You can serve wisdom and science.

You can devote yourself to study and to explore the Creation and all that is in it.

You can live for your work.

You can accumulate overtime and sick leave and holiday days by never missing a day of work or ever taking a day off.

Your goal is to impress the boss and get promotions.

You can live for riches.

Your goal in life is to get rich and to get rich quick so you can retire at 50.

You want the latest gadget, the newest toy, the biggest TV, the most expensive car

Pleasure, wisdom, work, riches – do you know what these all represent? They represent the idols of this earth.

At the end of his life Joshua spoke to Israel some parting words of wisdom.

He says, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ..."

You have to make a choice.

You have to make up your mind.

I want to ask you again: Whom do you serve? What do you serve?

Don't answer too quickly.

Don't say "Yes" too readily.

Nowhere does the Bible tell us that it is easy to serve the Lord Jesus.

But if it's so hard, and if the bible talks so clearly about the total inability of the human will to carry through with the promises we make, what hope is there for us?

If we were left to our own devices, there would be none at all.

But God has not left us to do it alone, and I'll say more about that in a moment as I conclude.

I think it is important to note how the book of Joshua finishes...

With 3 funerals (and no weddings).

The men they buried had some things in common. (Apart from all being dead!)

These were all godly and faithful men, great leaders of God's people.

And these burials, of Joseph, Joshua and Eleazar have meaning.

Joseph did not want to be buried in Egypt...it was not his land...

He wanted to be buried in the Promised Land, beside his forefathers.

So his bones were carried by the Exodus crowd.

And Joseph is finally laid to rest at Shechem.

The very place, back in Genesis 12, where God first promised the land to Abraham.

It is the place that Abraham and Sarah were buried.

It is the only part of the Promised Land that Abraham ever owned.

Then you have the burials of two members of the conquest generation,

Joshua and Eleazar,

It marks the end of this great era in salvation history,

and the beginning of life in the land.

But sadly, it marks the end of the great era of obedience.

And they all lived happily ever after... not!

Notice how Scripture summaries the life of Joshua...

All the days of his life, Israel served the Lord (v31)

Throughout his lifetime the people of Israel faithfully served the Lord.

Joshua served God as long as he lived...

And in his day Israel served God.

Joshua's faithful service influenced the men and women of his day.
Touching just one life for God is the most significant thing any human being can achieve.

But the death of Eleazar is significant for another reason.
He is the High Priest.

And the following books show the failure of the High Priestly system.
The books of Samuel record the wickedness of the sons of the Eli, who were corrupt priests.

While condemning them God adds a great promise, "I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind."

And of course the New Testament reveals that one to be Jesus.
He is the great leader to replace the likes of Joseph and Joshua.
He is the great High Priest, of whom Eleazar was just a shadow.

And only Jesus has perfectly done God's will...
Heb 10:9 tells us this - speaking about the Son of God, it says, "Then he said, "Here I am and I have come to do your will." ...And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

You see, it's not up to us after all.
Only Jesus is perfect
Only he has perfect faith.

All we do is keep on trusting in his goodness and grace shown at the cross.
You are not able to serve the Lord.
But Jesus is!

Becoming a Christian is not the end of the end the race, just the beginning.

We have just passed the starting line.
But Jesus will carry us over the finish line himself.
He is the one who gives us his Spirit and enables us to keep on being faithful to his covenant.

Now in this chapter, Joshua sets up a monument as a witness against them that they have covenanted to serve the Lord.

And our profession of faith in Jesus, however we have marked it, is a similar monument. If you have made some kind of public profession of faith in Jesus, that stands as a witness to the commitment you have made.

Is your life being lived in line with that commitment?

Let me tell you a story about a man named Dennis.

As a result of poor planning, Dennis, from Katy, Texas, needed some same-day dry cleaning before he left on a trip.

He remembered one store with a huge sign, "One-Hour Dry Cleaners," on the other side of town, so he drove out of his way to drop off a suit.

After filling out the tag, he told the person serving him, "I need this in an hour."

She said, "I can't get this back to you until Thursday."

"I thought you did dry cleaning in an hour?"

"No," she replied, "That's just the name of the store."

[Illustration from Ed Rowell, Franklin, Tennessee]

Those of us who carry the name Christian, but fail to live up to that name, create confusion and disillusionment for those who are investigating the faith.

Count the cost of commitment and be willing to pay it each day.

Conclusion

Martha and Paul...you have stood before us today and declare your love of Jesus...

You love the Lord and understand Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.

That is great news...a wonderful celebration.

But it still requires you to act every day to serve God.

It is a reminder for each of us...

"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

I hope and I pray that Jesus is central to your life, to every family and home.

I hope and I pray that whatever the cost you, by grace, choose to serve the Lord –

The God who loves us in Christ.