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Series: Joshua – A Call to Faith

Title: A Farewell to Arms

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Scripture: Joshua 23:1-6; 24:2-15

Thank you Deborah, Rachel and Catherine! We are indeed God's flock and He surely feeds us! He is GOOD and His mercy is forever sure!

I've decided that until this pandemic ends, I'll do my sermons in different parts of our campus---that way you won't forget what it looks like! Today I thought I'd do it in front of our commercial kitchen here in the ROC; this place where we get good physical food from Cheryl and her crew. I picked this as my "pulpit" because my constant prayer is that sermons will nourish us spiritually.

Let's Pray.

*Father God,*

*Feed us today with Your Word so we each grow up a little more into the fullness of Jesus. Nurture our Spirits such that we respond like Him; think like Him, act like Him, love like Him.*

*Grow us so that everyone we meet knows that we follow Jesus. I ask this in Jesus' name.*

**AMEN**

Have you ever noticed that when someone learns they are about to die, they choose their final words very carefully? Think of it. You husbands out there would want to make sure your wife knows you love her; knows all the things she needs to know to keep things going when you are gone. We would also want our kids to know we love them and we'd want to give them the wisdom they need. I mean, most people don't engage in idle prattle when they know they are about to breathe their last.

This morning we come to the end of our study of the book of Joshua where this leader gives the Hebrew people HIS final words. But before we read them let me give you the setting. It's been about 23 years since Caleb marched off to conquer the fortified cities of Hebron, and by now the conquest of the promised land is pretty much over. Joshua is 110 years young. And knowing that he will soon to pass from the scene, he gathers the leaders and the people together to give them his final charge.

Understand, Joshua has been serving these people for a long time: forty years as Moses' assistant, and 25 years as his successor leading the people to conquer and settle in the promised land. So, his final words are precious, indeed, because they come from the perspective of someone who has hung in there for the long haul, someone who has decades of accumulated wisdom gleaned from faithfully following God.

We don't have time to read all of his final message but let's look at an excerpt. Follow along as I read Joshua 23:1-3, 6 and 24:14-15.

***Joshua 23:1 – After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years,***

***2 – summoned all Israel their elders, leaders, judges and officials and said to them...***

***3 – “You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God Who fought for you.***

***6 – Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left.***

**Joshua 24:14 – “Now fear the LORD and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt and serve the LORD.**

**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. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”**

Now, Joshua’s final words boil down to one main statement. He was telling the Hebrew people, “*You have a choice to make. You can continue to serve God after I’m gone or not. It’s up to you. But you have to choose.*”

As for himself, Joshua had made this choice long ago. He had decided that He would serve the Lord and had lived his long life accordingly. But now he knew his death was near. He would no longer be the leader of this nation, telling them what to do. From now on they would have to choose. And understand, Joshua KNEW these people probably better than they knew themselves. He was there when they were born. Decade after decade He’d watched them grow up and then fight to conquer the land God had promised them.

And all this experience with these people told him they were wrestling with this choice. He knew they were wavering in their faith. They were wondering, if they still needed God now that this long war was over. And so, with his final words, Joshua confronted them with this choice – to continue to follow God or not.

With that in mind, I think our study of this text gives us a good chance to re-examine the depth of our own commitment to the Lord, so let’s review what he says.

**(1) First, Joshua says, following God is a HISTORICAL decision.**

In other words, it is a commitment that is based on what God has done in the past. In verse 3 he says, “***You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God Who fought for you.***” In the next chapter he leads them through a condensed history lesson of God’s acts for them in the past:

- He freed them from Egyptian bondage and parted the Red Sea
- He gave them victory over all the “ites---the Jericho ites, the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites

God says, “***You did not do it with your own sword and bow. No---I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.***”

Then Joshua interjects and says, “*Now folks, because of all this history, based on all God has done, choose! Decide if in years to come you will fear the LORD and serve Him.*”

Joshua was using some of his precious final words to remind them that this decision they had to make was really a no-brainer because continuing to follow God was the only reasonable option when they considered all that God had done for them in the past.

And when it comes to our following God, this principle is the same. I mean, if anyone today has even a partial understanding of all the ways God has blessed us in the past, and if they had any sense, they would indeed choose to follow---and KEEP ON following---God.

Review your own personal history. Look back at all that God has done for you! If you’re having trouble, here’s a hint. James 1:17 says, “***Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father Who does***

**not change.”** Look around in your place of quarantine---do you see any good gifts? Sure you do! I mean if God were to speak to us, He could say,  
*“I gave you that food you ate for breakfast this morning! I gave you the warm bed you slept in last night! I gave you that closet full of clothes! I caused those spring flowers and trees out your window to blossom! I have been with you in the trials of the past---and AM with you in the trial of this pandemic! I have helped you through this tough time and all the tough times that came before it! And lest you forget My PERFECT gift to you, I gave you My only Son. I sent Him to die for Your sins so that I could remove the sin barrier that exists between us. I raised Him on Easter so that death can no longer hurt you!”*

Do you get my drift? When we review our past, we can see it really is a no-brainer to decide to follow God in the future.

**(2) A second thing that Joshua’s farewell tells us is that the following God is an EXCLUSIVE deal.**

In verses 6-8 of chapter 23 he says in the years to come the Hebrew people must, ***“...be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses---without turning aside to the right or to the left.”*** In other words, God was to have no competition. He was to be their sole guide in the decisions of life. Joshua emphasized this by saying they were to, ***“...cleave to the LORD.”*** And, the word, “cleave” means to hang on tight, to stick like epoxy.

One of my “pandemic time filler-jobs” was to fix my walking shoes. The toe rubber was separating from the leather so I squirted some Gorilla glue in there and wrapped it with rubber bands and not only did the toe rubber cleave--so did part of the blue rubber band. I don’t think it will separate again! It is cleaving real good! The idea here is that following God is something we STICK to like GLUE. We never let go to follow another.

Joshua used some of his last words to emphasize this exclusivity deal because he knew that idolatry was prevalent in the land and that it was beginning to have an influence on the Hebrew people. Don’t get me wrong. Some of the Jews were strong in their faith. Like Joshua, they had decided to spend their lives in service to God. They had given Him their full allegiance and they were sticking to this decision. But there were others who had begun to embrace the pagan culture around them. They were already dabbling in the worship of foreign gods, beginning to live their lives according to the immoral practices of their new peers.

Between these two smaller groups there the majority. They had made no clear decision as to where they stood in relation to God. Joshua was telling them, *“You can worship the gods of Egypt or pick one of the plethora of false gods that are worshipped here---or you can choose to serve the one TRUE GOD---the God Who had made you into a people---HIS people---the God Who brought you out of Egypt and gave you this land. It’s time to quit straddling the fence. You have to choose. But remember, this is an exclusive choice. God will tolerate no rivals.”*

Well, let me ask you, what idols compete with the One True God in your life? Before you answer let me remind you that idolatry is moving God out of His rightful place in our day-to-day lives and replacing Him with something or someone else. And reminder #2, our God is a jealous God. He is zealous for our complete devotion. In other words, as Joshua says, when it comes to choosing to serve Him it’s all or nothing!

Well, what about it? Have you given your exclusive allegiance to God? Here’s some questions to help you with your answer: What preoccupies or rules your heart? Your thoughts? Your time? What compels you? Controls you? Drives you? Motivates you? To what does your heart cling-cleave? What gives you a sense of worth? What defines your identity? What do family or close friends think may be idols in your life? Some might assume we worship toilet paper these days!

All kidding aside, this last question is a good one because the object of your worship shows. People will notice what it is that is first in your life. So, what would they say?

The point is, We can't follow God AND something else. It's all or nothing.

### **(3) Finally, Joshua says that following God is a PERSONAL decision.**

I mean, it's a choice that you must make for yourself. This is what Joshua was getting at when he said in verse 15, ***"As for me, I am choosing to serve the LORD. What about you?"*** My dad once said, *"The Christian religion knows nothing about a proxy faith."* And he was right. When it comes to the choice to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and then spend your life serving Him as Lord, no one can decide this for you. Your pastor can't decide this for you. Your deacon can't. Your parents can't. It is your decision. you decide. You respond to God. No one does this for you by proxy.

And speaking of parents, Joshua also reminds us that Christian parents have to decide whether or not they will follow God's instruction and teach their children about Him. Joshua says, ***"As for me AND MY HOUSE we will serve the Lord."*** If we read on, we would see that the people replied saying that ***"Yes, WE will serve the Lord!"*** Joshua asked them again and again and repeatedly they said yes. Finally, he accepted their answer and put up a stone memorial to remind them of their commitment to teach their children about God. I'm sure there were a lot of "Amen's" as he did so. But unfortunately those parents did not follow through with this commitment. They didn't teach their children about God's loving actions. In the very next book of the Bible, in Judges chapter 2:1-2 it says,

***"After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, Who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them."***

So, the parents didn't make this choice. How sad. You know the fact is we are only one generation away from a culture that turns it's back on our faith because all it takes is the failure of one generation of parents to tell their children about God. Parents, this pandemic is a perfect opportunity to tell your kids about YOUR commitment to follow God!

Sadly, there are many parents these days who say, *"I don't want to influence my child when it comes to religion. When they are old enough, they will choose for themselves."* I find it strange that they don't follow that philosophy in other important matters. They don't let their young children decide when to go to bed or what to eat or wear. They don't let them decide if they want to go to school or not. They don't say, *"Hey play in the street if you want to! That's your choice."*

Well, why this inconsistency? Why give your child some guidance in life, but refuse to give them the most important guidance? Again, please don't misunderstand me. The final choice of faith is up to the child but a child needs guidance and encouragement that will help them make the right choice. Think of it this way. If children are allowed to grow up like weeds in a spiritual wilderness, chances are good that they will remain weeds.

Another thing. You can be sure that your child does not grow up in a spiritual vacuum. If you don't teach him, someone else will. Listen to these words, *"The facts show that it is the family which is the main center of maintaining the religious spirit. We cannot and we shall not remain indifferent to the fate of children on whom their parents, fanatical believers, commit an act of spiritual violence. We are not indifferent to the fact that, in the Soviet society, a family is a cell of communist education or a refuge of backward conceptions."*

These words were spoken in 1964 by one of Nikita Khrushchev's top deputies. Back then the Russians feared Christianity so much that they forcibly took children from believing parents. Even they were wise enough to know something that many Christian parents apparently ignore. The family is the key to passing on faith in Jesus. Well let me ask you moms and dads. What about it? Like Joshua have you made the commitment to tell your kids all about the Lord you love and serve so that they can make a well-informed decision?

If you have, sing with me:

*"I have decided to follow Jesus! I have decided to follow Jesus! I have decided to follow Jesus! No turning back!  
No turning back!*

*I want my kids to follow Jesus! I want my kids to follow Jesus! I want my kids to follow Jesus! All of their lives,  
all of their lives!*

AMEN.

Now---Let the PEACE OF CHRIST rule in your hearts  
since as members of one body you were called to peace.  
Let the WORD OF CHRIST dwell in you richly  
and whatever you do...in word or in deed  
Do it all in the NAME OF CHRIST giving thanks to God the Father  
through Him.