

Joshua 24

We Will Serve the Lord

September 5, 2021

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We are going to Joshua 24 today. This is our last Sunday in Joshua, and next week we will begin our study through 1 Peter which will take us through fall and the beginning of winter. We'll start 1 Peter here at the Temple Building and, Lord willing, finish it over at the new place at 440 East Ave, which is still on track to be our location on the first Sunday in December.

In Joshua 24, we are now at the end of Joshua's life. He has successfully led the people into the promised land, He has allotted the land for the people as the Lord commanded. God had been faithful to all of his promises, the people were finally receiving this land that God had promised hundreds of years earlier.

And now Joshua is 110, which is getting up there in years, and now he gathers the people together for some final words before he sends them all off to sit under their own vines and fig trees in their new home.

And you can hear in what Joshua will say today one driving concern: He wants these people to continue to be a unique people and remain faithful to the Lord.

At this point, God has built them into something significant. They were a unique people, they were obedient to God, they were blessed by God. But Joshua knew there were threats to the work God had done among them. These people were already beginning to be faced with some serious temptation: the temptation of becoming just like the people they had worked so hard to replace in that land.

They didn't take over the land of the Canaanites just to fill it with more people who worshipped the same gods and had all of the same values and the same worldview as the Canaanites. They were there to be a light and a blessing to the nations, not exactly the same as the nations.

But Joshua knew they were under pressure to adopt the gods and the ways of the nations around them. And he knew that that kind of slide into rebellion against God isn't

usually an overnight thing, seeds are planted that grow. We'll see in verse 23 that they already have some false gods creeping in among them.

And he probably knew that their newfound prosperity and ease could be fertile soil for a drift from faithfulness to God into peace with all of the pleasures and temptations of the world around them. They'd be tempted to not feel their need for God now that they were in the land.

And for us, there is a similar temptation to slowly but surely become more and more like the world around us. To slowly adopt the world's idols, to value what the world values, to creep toward being just the same as those who don't claim to have been redeemed by Jesus, who are not under the authority of Jesus, and who don't claim to believe the Bible is his word. And so the reminders and warnings here are pertinent to us, too.

We can find ourselves at a place where, after years of drift, there is no distinguishable difference between our core beliefs and the core beliefs of our neighbors who don't claim to know Christ. And that can happen while we're still religious, still church going, but we so adopt the values and idols of those around us, and so change our christianity to fit the times, that Christianity actually becomes against our religion.

So let's look at what Joshua has to remind us of here. Joshua calls them all together for not only a sermon, but a ceremony to renew their covenant with God in an historic place:

Joshua 24:1-13 “Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel ¹to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God. ² And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. ³ Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac.

So he calls them all to Shechem. This was the place where in chapter 8 the people gathered on the sides of Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim and had the law of God displayed on the mountainside and they recited the blessings and the curses of the law.

This is also the place where way back, hundreds of years before this, God appeared to Abraham.

Genesis 12:6-7 “6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.”

So Joshua gathers everyone at this historic place that reminds them of all of their history with the Lord, and at this place where God appeared to Abraham, Joshua reminded Abraham’s descendants who were now numerous and who now possessed the land of the story of grace that got them here.

And this is a key for them and for us to remain a unique people, is to never forget what made us the people of God. And it wasn’t us, first and foremost.

He doesn’t start by saying, “Abraham was a good and righteous man, so God gave him these promises.” He says, “They served other gods.” Abraham, who lived in Ur of the Chaldees, was probably some kind of moon worshipper. But God appeared to Abraham in Genesis 12:1:

Genesis 12:1-2 “1 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

Abraham hadn’t earned God’s favor here. He wasn’t looking for God. But God came looking for him and said, “I’m taking you away from here, I’m going to make your descendants from your barren wife become a great nation in the land of Canaan. You’re going to worship Me and not the false gods of your ancestors.”

God chose Abraham, and it was all grace. There was nothing in him that made him worthy of God. But God decided to set his favor on Abraham and his descendants.

So Joshua kicks off this covenant renewal ceremony by reminding them first and foremost of God’s grace. We are who we are because God gave us something that none of us deserve, because God intervened to save us and He acted on our behalf.

He knew that an essential element in preserving their faithfulness was an awareness that they were not God’s people because of their efforts, because of some uniqueness in them, because they met some condition or because they were somehow superior. It was

because of God's unmerited favor. Listen to this next section, listen to who the hero of the story is, who the active party in them becoming a people is - verse 3 again:

Joshua 24:3-13 ³ Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac. ⁴ And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. ⁵ And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it, and afterward I brought you out. ⁶ “Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea. And the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. ⁷ And when they cried to the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness a long time. ⁸ Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan. They fought with you, and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. ⁹ Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel. And he sent and invited Balaam the son of Beor to curse you, ¹⁰ but I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand. ¹¹ And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand. ¹² And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. ¹³ I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.’

Again and again, God is reminding these people through Joshua that they are who they are because of what God had done for them. He called them out, he fought for them, he saved them. And even the victories the people felt like they had won, they had only won because God had been active on their behalf.

It wasn't their works that made them who they had become, it was the unmerited, undeserved grace of God.

It wasn't something in them that made them who they had become. It wasn't their religious achievements that made them the people of God. It wasn't their goodness, it was all God's grace.

And for us as Christians it is so important to remember that we are the people of God solely because of God's grace, not because of our worthiness or our superiority in any way.

John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."

Every one of us who became a Christian did so because we were drawn by the Father. We were like Abraham, off worshipping other gods, and the Father showed His grace and intervened in our lives and showed us his glory, allowed us to hear about the cross and resurrection of Jesus, opened our eyes to His beauty, and drew us in.

And even the faith we have that made us Christians was a gift from God.

And every victory in our lives, every moral victory, every bit of progress made, every change in us was all made by God because of His grace.

It was because God intervened in history and sent his Son to deliver us from sin that we became Christians.

Why is it so important for Joshua to remind the people of God's grace in their history? Why does that matter if they're going to persevere? Why does that matter if we are going to persevere?

Having a deep sense that we are only saved and we are only a people because of God's grace, and not because of our works, guards us against pride.

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

God saved us by His grace, and knowing that keeps us from boasting. We didn't do it. It wasn't our religious achievement that made us Christians.

Because pride, thinking much of yourself, always leads you quickly to ingratitude. And ingratitude leads to dark thinking and departure from the faith.

Romans 1 describes this progression like this:

Romans 1 “21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

To know God but not honor God or give thanks to God is the beginning of the darkening of a heart that eventually leads to their complete departure from God.

So Joshua starts by recounting all that God had done for them to make them who they are, so that nobody can boast, so that everybody can be thankful, and to prevent the darkening of their hearts and departure from God.

Recognizing God’s amazing grace that intervened in our lives to make us Christians, recognizing that we brought nothing but sin and need to the table and God brought the bread and the wine of his body and blood, recognizing our continued failures and continued need for the savior, and God’s continued abundant and relentless grace that works in our behalf, makes us humble and thankful people.

In fact, that’s a big reason we gather every week. Joshua gathered the people here for a covenant renewal ceremony, and we gather weekly as a covenant renewal ceremony. We aren’t here for entertainment, we aren’t here to express ourselves, we aren’t here to make ourselves feel good about doing our religious duty this week.

We are here to recount the grace of God that has worked in history in sending his son to die to rescue us from sin and death and hell, the grace of God that gave us faith, that made us, who were not a people before, into a new people.

It’s a big reason we take the Lord’s supper, even if it is the pre-packaged COVID type. It’s to remember the grace of God in our history, to show the Lord’s death until He comes back for us, to maintain and strengthen our faith, to remind us of the grace of the gospel that saves and changes us. To participate together in a covenant renewal ceremony and to tell again the story of God’s grace in the Gospel that makes us who we are.

We need the constant telling and retelling of the story of God’s grace that has made us a people.

This should make us a more unique people: a humble people, and a thankful people.

We are so constantly reminded of God's grace that when we're tempted to complain about our lot in life and shake our fist at God and give up following Him in exasperation because things haven't gone the way we think they should for us, we can remember all of his grace in our history, and say, "How could we do anything but serve Him in thankfulness and joy?"

Joshua 24:14 "Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD."

Notice what he calls them to do in response to the grace of God:

Fear the Lord, serve him, and put away false gods.

The right response to believing in God's grace in your life is to be a worshipper of God, to serve God, and to renounce other gods.

Joshua is saying this here to a faithful people, knowing that the false gods that are served by the people around them always hold some allure. They were susceptible to a subtle drift toward blending right in, accepting the ways and the worship of the people around them. And so are we.

In fact, we might be a lot farther down the road to accepting the worship of the gods of our land than we might think we are. And we know that because of how little difference there is between the life of a Christian and the life of anyone else around us.

When Christian Smith, a sociologist from Notre Dame, studied the real religion of Christian adolescents in 2005 - teenagers in church youth groups, he said that their faith really wasn't Christian, but was "Moralistic, therapeutic deism."

It is a religion that says you can be a good and happy person if you live morally. It's a religion that gives you therapeutic benefits like a feeling of well being, a religion that would help you "Live Long and Prosper," but didn't involve anything that looked like historic Christianity.

And in trying to discern the attributes of the god these teens were worshipping, he said that god was *"something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he's always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to*

feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process."

Smith wrote that, *"a significant part of Christianity in the United States is actually only tenuously Christian in any sense that is seriously connected to the actual historical Christian tradition, but has rather substantially morphed into Christianity's misbegotten step cousin, Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."*

So that was the predominant Christianity of teenagers in 2005. And they're in their thirties now. So this is the God that many of us grew up on. We've listened to lessons about this god, our songs are often predominantly feel good therapeutic songs about our feelings, we view the Bible as a self-help book.

As a result of holding to a wrong or deficient view of God, many of our lives are very much the same as non-Christians, and our faith is flimsy:

This kind of Christianity often doesn't last: it can't survive the crashes of life. It seems to work when we're happy and life is going well. It can seem to work in the teenage years when everything seems new and more exciting. But when life gets hard and the Jesus therapy doesn't work anymore, we quit the faith altogether, and people are doing it in droves in our day.

So we grew up with a god who is very undefined, we don't have a sense of how God has acted in our history, we just have a vague notion that God wants to be our friend and for us to feel accepted.

And we are always shaped into the image of the god we worship.

Psalm 115:4-8 4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. 5 They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. 6 They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. 7 They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. 8 Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

So the reason that our faith has the strengths and the holes that it has is because of the strengths and the holes in our view of God. And the reason Christianity can seem so formless and without distinction and so flimsy is because the god we worship is formless

and without distinction.

So Joshua wants these people to understand clearly who God is and what God has done for them. He wants them to know God and serve him and fear him, and to make a clean break with the gods of the land around them. And notice what he says next:

Joshua 24:15 ¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Notice the possibility Joshua presents here. He says that it may be evil in their eyes to serve the Lord.

The nations around them weren't neutral toward the God of Israel. They hated him. They hated God's law. They hated the ways of the Jewish faithful.

And this is going to be an important adjustment for many of us to make. One social commentator, Aaron Wrenn, says that we have rapidly moved from what he calls the positive world, to the neutral world, to the negative world.¹²

Positive world in the US lasted, he says, until about 1994. In that world, Christianity was a status-enhancer. To be seen as a devout Christian was a social positive, and you could actually be hurt socially if people thought you weren't a Christian. If we described someone as a church-goer in those days, it was a compliment. And, as you might expect, a lot of people pretended to be Christians because of the benefits. Politicians faked it, but also lots of regular people who grew up in the Christian community but never really came to faith or repented themselves stayed in church, talked the talk, kept up the appearance.

Then we switched to a neutral world, according to Wrenn, around 1994. It was a world where being a Christian wasn't a positive or negative. That was actually the world we planted our church in, in 2009. And in that world devout Christians would often try to convince people on the fence that Christianity was indeed true and worth considering, we thought all we needed to do was make sure we weren't being too churchy and using theological language that was confusing so that we could persuade so many on-the-fence people to believe.

¹ <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/evangelicalism-lost-world-benedict-option/>

² <https://themasculinist.com/the-church-in-the-negative-world/>

But then around 2014, we switched to a negative world, where being a Christian is seen as a social negative, and as harmful to society. It has started costing people jobs and status, you get cancelled for being a faithful Christian. Being called a church-goer is no longer a compliment, it's now an insult.

The world is no longer neutral to the faith, they're now seeing it as a negative, unless we change the faith enough that it fits right in, which makes it good for nothing, according to Jesus.³

And here's what's happening now that there is a social cost to being a faithful Christian. Some are so changing the faith that it fits right in with the world, but looks nothing like historic Christianity, particularly on issues like gender and marriage and justice.

Many are jumping ship altogether, with the ex-vangelical crowd growing by the day.

And rather than faking it and staying in church, those who don't believe are leaving the faith community quickly. And it seems that almost everyone I know in their late 40s or older has straying adult children who are renouncing the faith. (I don't think it's new that many of the children grow up not to believe, I think it's new that there's no more reason to fake it.)

It is evil in the eyes of many to serve the Lord.

Life in this changed world is very different for Christians than it was even a dozen years ago when we planted Grace Road. It's strange to us, and can seem like it's all doom and gloom, because something has certainly been lost. But, and we'll talk about this more next week in 1 Peter, that's been the norm for the people of God most of the time through history. They've been a small minority of faithful people, living with joy in Christ in a world where it is thought of as evil to serve the Lord.

It's not a reason to lose our joy. In fact, it's all the more reason to have joy. To be a people who are uniquely humble and joyful even though we aren't in power, we aren't cool, we lose things, but Christ is enough.

In the negative world they were living in, Joshua didn't get mopey. Even though he saw hints that the people of Israel might be starting to flirt with the gods of the world, he didn't back down. He laid the choice in front of them: "If you think it's evil to serve the

³ Matthew 5:13 "13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

Lord, don't. Go with the other gods - the gods of the nations around here, the gods worshipped in Egypt, there are any number of gods, and any number of lifestyles that you can pick that will be far less offensive to the sophisticated people that surround you.

And Joshua, courageously, said, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

He wasn't going to twist the faith to fit what the nations around them thought was right. He was going to serve the Lord, with courage and joy, and if people wanted the Lord to be different, he couldn't help them, he just urged them to shop for a different god.

In light of all of God's grace to them, in light of all God had done, in light of his incredible grace in revealing himself and making them a people, the only choice for Joshua was to lead his household to serve the Lord.

And we do have to choose.

Everybody has a god, everybody has an ultimate, and everybody has scriptures, or a set of assumptions and philosophies and truths that guide their lives.

And so the choice for us is not the God of the Bible or no god, it's a choice of which god, which ultimate. It isn't a choice of which set of truths is inerrant and incontrovertible, it is a choice of which one.

Everyone has a bible, or an ultimate standard.

And in a negative world, where the ultimate standard has changed, where our frame of reference has shifted from seeing God and his word as the highest authority to seeing the self as the highest authority, we are tempted to shift to a new highest authority and then judge Christianity by it.

So, for example, we will make our political philosophies our highest authority. And people choose churches based on their politics, and are very resistant to having political philosophies changed by the Bible or their church. Their Bible has become The Wealth of Nations or Das Kapital. We start with our authoritative political philosophy and then judge Christianity by it.

Or, we will first develop our philosophy of what justice is, and then evaluate Christianity by it. So we might then say, "I'm not sure biblical Christianity is just." By what standard? You are appealing to some standard, some bible somewhere.

Or we might develop our sense for what the church should be from somewhere outside of scripture. And we might say, "I'm not sure the church is doing what it should in the world." I agree with you. But what standard are you evaluating it by?

In history there have been great reformers who have said that the church is not behaving itself biblically and needs to be changed, and they've brought about great and helpful change and we're always in need of more reform.

But sometimes we will say, "The church is not doing what it should in the world," but the standard that it is being evaluated by isn't scripture. It's a standard of justice that our political party holds, it's a standard for right and wrong that we learned on campus. And there are many attempts to reform the church, but according to a different standard altogether. Many of the reforms in our day start with a different standard, and then look at the Bible and ask, "Did God really say that?" "That seems evil, by our standard."

As Christians, we have gone all in on the Bible as our scriptures. We don't always read the bible the right way and we often need to reform, but our reforms move us toward the Bible. If we think the church isn't being biblical, we may be right and change is necessary.

But if we think that biblical Christianity seems wrong by modern standards, we aren't supposed to keep trying to twist it to fit our new standards. If you must, according to Joshua, just go all in and serve those other gods with their other scriptures.

Joshua is telling the people, "If you wanna be Canaanite, be canaanite. There are lots of gods to choose from. But that's not Israel, that's not us - we have a history of God working on our behalf, making us unique, giving us his law, and we're going to serve Him."

So the people respond:

Joshua 24:16 Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, 17 for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. 18 And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

So the people say, “He’s done so much for us, we will serve God. He rescued us, he saved us. Of course we will serve him.”

And they say, “Far be it from us” that we should forsake God. Now you keep reading in Judges and it isn’t too far from them at all, that’s what they do - they repeatedly run after other gods and try to turn Israel into an acceptable Canaanite nation.

But they say, “We’re going to serve the Lord.”

Joshua’s reply is surprising:

¹⁹ But Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.” ²¹ And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD.” ²² Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.”

He says, “Now that I’ve told you what it means to serve God, that you have to forsake other gods, if you turn from God, you will be witnesses against yourselves.” In other words, “You are saying that you know what it means to serve Him, you are saying you will serve Him, and if you ever turn from Him your own words will be used to judge you. God is going to hold you to that.” There’s no fine print here, no bait and switch.

You are saying you will live by this law. But if you are committing yourself to live by this law, if you break it, you will die by this law.

And they say, “We know.”

But Joshua looks at them and knows something. In verse 19, he says, “You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God.”

God is perfect, and demands perfection. And these people are pledging obedience to God, but Joshua knows they’ll never measure up. God will be true: he will bless them if they obey and be against them if they don’t. But he knows these people. He remembers the sin of Achan, the grumbling of the people, their propensity to wander.

And he knows this law that they are pledging to obey will only condemn them in the end. So it's an ominous moment - they are doing the right thing in pledging to serve the Lord, but he knows they won't measure up.

So Joshua makes this covenant official again:

²³ He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel." ²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey." ²⁵ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. ²⁶ And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. ²⁷ And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God." ²⁸ So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance. ²⁹ After these things Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being 110 years old. ³⁰ And they buried him in his own inheritance at Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. ³¹ Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel.

So they go on to serve God, but only while Joshua and his co-leaders are alive. There's a hint here that Joshua's prophecy would come true, and in the end, they wouldn't be able to serve God, and the rest of the OT tells us that the people didn't keep their end of the bargain.

So there are some similarities between these people and us, but also some differences.

Similarities in that, like them, we meet regularly to renew our covenant with God (each service of the gathered church is that.) We hear God's commands, we confess our sins, we say, "we will obey him."

Israel gathered together to say, "We definitely serve the Lord, we reject the gods of the world around us." And we, too, gather here weekly as a witness to the world around us that we don't worship the same gods, we don't have the same ultimate. They can choose any number of gods to serve, but we will serve the Lord.⁴

⁴ These comparisons were gleaned from this sermon by Kim Riddlebarger here: <file:///Users/mac/Downloads/We%20Will%20Serve%20the%20LORD%20edited%2088.pdf>

And it is true, that week after week, our words are witnesses against us. We sin and fall short and don't obey God with the holiness He requires.

But a big difference is that we are gathering to celebrate a better covenant.

Matthew 26:26-29 “26Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” 27And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, 28for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

When we assemble and hear God's law, we confess that it's true. We pledge our allegiance to Him week after week. But we are part of a new covenant where there is forgiveness of sins by the blood of Jesus.

In Joshua 24:20, when Joshua warned the people that if they turned against God, God would turn against them and consume them, he was speaking the truth. But under our covenant, God stepped in to be consumed on our behalf.

And so when we gather every week we are proclaiming the holiness of God, the commands of God, but far more than that we are proclaiming the good news of the gospel. We aren't confessing our faithfulness to Him when we gather, but our sins. And we are confessing his faithfulness to us.

Jesus came as the true and better Joshua who is still alive, still leading his people, still interceding for us in our failures. His death on the cross absorbed all of the wrath of God that we deserved for breaking His law.

And when we join with Jesus in eating the bread and drinking the cup, we are proclaiming God's faithfulness to save us and forgive us and cleanse us, and to bring a remedy for all of our disobedience to the law.

<Prayer of confession, followed by silent prayer>

<Lord's Supper>

Prayer of Confession after today's sermon was adapted from a prayer called “Covenant Faithfulness” on pages 56-57 of the prayer book, Prone to Wander by Duguid and Hook.

Questions for Sermon Discussion:

- 1) Discuss the statement: Christianity may be against our religion. What does that mean? How might that be the case?
- 2) Why does Joshua begin his message to the people by reminding them of their history?
- 3) What is the church's history that we need to be reminded of to spark obedience and faithfulness?
- 4) Discuss Joshua's bleak statement: "You are not able to serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:19). What does he mean by that?
- 5) Discuss the idea that the gathering of the church is a weekly covenant renewal ceremony. What does that mean for us?