

Joshua

Last Words: The Sequel

Joshua 24

Richard Baxter, a renowned Presbyterian minister in the 1600's, once said, *"I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."* In the final three chapters of **Joshua**, Joshua delivers three sermons to three different congregations with that kind of urgency.

vv. 14-15. *"Now fear Yahweh and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River (Euphrates) and in Egypt, and serve Yahweh. But if serving Yahweh 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 Yahweh."*

vv. 3-13 Yahweh: *"I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River...I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau...I sent Moses and Aaron...I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out...I brought your fathers out of Egypt ...I brought you to the land of the Amorites...I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you...When Balak, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel... I delivered you out of his hand...The citizens of Jericho fought against you...but I gave them into your hands. I sent the hornet ahead of you. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. So 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."*

All they are, all they have, and all they will ever be is due to the pure grace of God.

In reviewing Israel's past, Joshua was not reminding them of some great heritage they were being challenged to live up to. Rather, he reminds them that God pursued them and loved them in spite of their sin and depravity, echoing what Moses said back in **Deuteronomy 7:6-7**.

What was true of Israel is true of us.

Ephesians 1 Like Joshua, Paul summarizes all that God has done for us by his pure grace.

Ephesians 2:1-9 Like Joshua, Paul reminds us what we were when God found us.

Theology about our salvation in the face of our sin wasn't all that Paul wrote to the Ephesians or the Galatians, or Colossians, Romans, Philippians and Thessalonians, and this wasn't all that Joshua preached to Israel that day, as well. All this theology about God's grace and our depravity served as a preamble to what Paul and Joshua were most deeply concerned that we and Israel get.

Our Positional Standing vs. Our Personal State

We are called to covenant faithfulness, to live in a manner worthy of so great a salvation, because, frankly, after all that God had done to save Israel, and all that God has done to save us, we still dabble in idolatry.

After many of years of experiencing God's grace and all that God had given Israel and us, there is a degree to which our past corruption clings to us.

Joshua 24:14, 23 *"Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt...throw away the foreign gods that are among you."* (cf. **Acts 19**)

Romans 8:6 *A mind governed by the flesh is death, the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.*

Galatians 5:17 *Our flesh wars against the Spirit the Spirit wars against our flesh.*

Ephesians 4:21-24 Put off the old self; put on the new self that God created in us after his own righteousness.

Just like the NT writers, the tense Joshua uses when he calls Israel to choose that day to throw away their idols and serve Yahweh implies more than a once-for-all choosing, as if you make a choice and are done with it. Joshua chose, and he chose, and he chose, and he kept on choosing to love and serve Yahweh.

Every individual and every generation must do the same. God has no grandchildren. Yahweh cannot simply be mommy and daddy's God.

vv. 16-18 *Far be it from us to forsake Yahweh to serve other gods...We too will serve Yahweh, because he is our Elohim.*

Joshua didn't buy it. Words are cheap. Joshua wants to see faith in action. Repentance (change of mind) is only the beginning.

*It's the deeds worthy of repentance that demonstrates a true, saving faith in Yahweh and what brings real transformation. (cp. **Matthew 3:7-8; Acts 26:20**)*

vv. 19-20: *You are not able to serve Yahweh. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake Yahweh and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you."*

v. 21 *"No! We will serve Yahweh."*

v. 22a *"You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve Yahweh."*

v. 22b *"Yes, we are witnesses."*

v. 23 *"Then throw away your foreign gods."*

v. 24 *"Yes, we will serve Yahweh our Elohim and obey him."*

Finally, Joshua accepts their words and drew up a covenant between Israel and God, including their commitment to rid their lives of idols and love and serve Yahweh only. Joshua wrote it up and recorded it in the Book of God's Law. The book of **Joshua**, especially this chapter, is that record. This chapter follows the form of an ancient Middle East treaty between an overlord and his subjects. The book of **Joshua** is a legally binding document between Israel and God.

Joshua erected a large stone as a memorial and uttered his parting words: **v. 27** *"See! This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words Yahweh has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."*

v. 31 Israel served Yahweh throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him.

Tragically, in the very next book of the Bible - **Judges 2:10-12** *"After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither Yahweh nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh and served the Baals. They forsook Yahweh, the Elohim of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them."*

People are not drawn to God through coercion, but through example and invitation.

A generation from now, our children and grandchildren may utterly forsake the Lord. We must give ourselves to the

sacred duty of making disciples who make disciples that make disciples of Jesus.

“As for me and my household, we serve Yahweh.”