

Choose This Day Whom You Will Serve

Bible Verses Referenced: Joshua 24:1-28, Genesis 12:13, Exodus 12, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Matthew 25:1-13

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Word. In it, we find the words of life. We ask that our hearts would be attuned so that we can hear Your voice and not only hear it, but become doers, responsive to Your call upon our lives, that our choices would be reflective of the way that You have called us to live. So, may the preaching of Your Word be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son, Jesus, in His name we pray.

Amen. Please. So, in the Old Testament passage, which we're going to reflect on today, we have moved from the story of the Exodus and the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years into the land of promise, where Joshua has led the Israelites into the conquering and the conquest of the land.

The passage that we have today is at the very end of the book of Joshua, where Joshua is taking stock, where he has called all of the Israelites to gather together and to assess and do what sometimes we call in our day and age a gut check and say, "Are we all still in?"

Are we all on the same page in our commitments to the Lord or not?" And so, today is a commitment Sunday, we'll call it that, where we're invited to have our own gut check as to whether we are committed to the Lord or not. The passages of our Scriptures all challenge us to ask ourselves the question and to make the commitment.

Are we all in for the Lord, or are we not? So, I want to think about this threshold moment with Joshua, where first and foremost, Joshua makes his own commitment as a leader to the people. One of the things that we all need is to be led by faithful leaders.

And we want to know that the person at the top is all in, and that can help us to know that we can be all in, and we're all in it together. And so, Joshua begins reminding them of their story and how God has been the one who has been faithful to His promises for their entire journey. And He goes way back. He goes all the way back to the time of Israel in being called through their Father Abraham.

"Thus says the Lord, long ago your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates. Terra, the father of Abraham and of Nahor, and they served other gods. Then the Lord says, "I took your Father Abraham from beyond the river and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many." The Lord is reminding the Israelites through Joshua that God has been faithful to His covenant keeping, that the Lord has chosen this people to give them this land and to be their faithful God.

And so He reminds them of where God found them. It's not unlike here we're celebrating Veterans Day Weekend. And if I were to say something like, "Do you remember how things were back when the British owned everything?" Do you remember those days?

How the things were way back when, several hundred years ago, when we had taxation without representation, and people weren't free to live their lives, and how the Lord has been faithful to this country and shown His blessings on us. God has blessed America and shed His grace on thee.

And through the generations of those who have served, we are reminded that to take seriously and to be vigilant and not taking for granted the freedoms which we now enjoy. Does that make sense? Well, that's the same kind of thing that Joshua is doing with the Israelites.

He's saying, "Remember that you've had a long story of God's salvation and His provision through His deliverance and redemption of you as a people, and there's lots of heroes of the faith, like Abraham and so on, who have brought you to this point.

So here we are enjoying the blessings of being in the land but let us not take it for granted and take for granted the freedoms and the abundance and the conquests that we now enjoy." And so Joshua

says to the people, he says, "I want you to know where I stand as a leader." He says to them, "Choose you this day.

Therefore, fear the Lord. Serve Him in sincerity and faithfulness. Put away the gods that your father served beyond the river in Egypt. And if it's evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve. Whether the gods your father served in the region beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites and those in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. You have a choice to make, people.

This is what Joshua was saying. You can serve the gods of NFL football, or college football, or the little gods of fishing out in the river, or the little white balls that roll in the green grasses. You know those what I'm talking about?

Or your business and your industry, I mean, we have to translate these Scriptures into the gods of our day, whatever they are. And we all have our temptations of gods that we could backslide back to. Joshua says, "I want you to know that from my perspective, in me, my household, we are 100% in with the Lord.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." I've shared this with you before about myself, is that I actually fear God more than I fear you. And it's important that you know that about me. On the positive side, I love the Lord more than I love you. More than I love the things of this world. Now, I don't do that perfectly.

There are times where my heart is led astray and gets tempted just like everybody else. But my commitment to not just you, but to the Lord, is I'm 100% in for Him. And I made that commitment back when I was in college. And I've tried to live faithful to that my entire life.

One of the places where that manifests itself is ever since even in college, I've made commitments at times like pledging and stewardship time to be a tither. In other words, that's what the Scripture says. You should give the Lord 10% of what the Lord gives to you so that you can be faithful. And I haven't done that in our household. We haven't been faithful tithers every single year.

There have been times where we have and times when we haven't. But what I've learned over the course of my 25-plus years walking with the Lord is that it's always best to be faithful to Him. And that the times and seasons where I'm doing things like tithing have been times in which the Lord has also shown forth His generosity in my life and been abundant.

And the times when I'm not been as close in walking with Him have been times where I've had a certain measure of consequences. And so one of the things that I would encourage you is I want you to know that from our household standpoint, when we talk about things like pledging and stewardship, we are 100% in. When we were setting up the pledging, my pledge card was the first one that was in the plate, and it represents a tithe of our income.

I say that not to put guilt or burdens on you, but to just let you know that our household is 100% not just in for St. Mark's, but we are 100% in for the Lord. And we want to lead by example in the way that we support you and serve you.

Now the Israelites heard the leadership of Joshua at that time, and they themselves, because every single one of us has a responsibility as followers of God, they themselves made a commitment to the Lord as well. And so, listen to the way the Israelites responded. The people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord and serve other gods." And then they give a reason why they are committed as a group of people.

Because the Lord, our God, brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us all the way that we went among all the peoples through whom we passed. The Lord drove out before us all the peoples. Therefore, we also will serve the Lord, for He is our God. The reason why the people gave for their commitment to the Lord was because they had been redeemed, delivered, and saved by God.

They understood the nature of their salvation and how God had been faithful to them, and how God had graciously cared for them, led them, and redeemed and delivered them to the great blessings that they have. Everything that they had was a gift from God. Sometimes when we give our offerings up here, we say, "All things come of thee, O Lord." And what do you say? "And of thine own have we given thee." Everything that we have is a blessing from God.

And the Israelites of that time, they understood that God is the one who had blessed them abundantly. But Joshua wasn't going to let them off the hook that easy. He said, I don't think that you can do it. I don't think that you can be faithful to serving the Lord your God. He says to the people, "You're not able to serve the Lord. He's a holy God.

He's a jealous God." You need to understand the nature of God is one not just of grace and generosity, but He also has a side of justice and holiness. And if you are not faithful to your commitment to Him, this will have its consequences in your life. The people said to Joshua, "No, we will serve the Lord." So Joshua challenged the people yet a third time.

He says, "You're witnessing against yourself with your commitments." And you said, "You have chosen the Lord to serve Him." And they said, "Yes, that's right. We are witnesses against ourselves." And he says, "Well, then you need to put away the foreign gods out of your life.

Put away those and incline your heart to the Lord." And the people responded to Joshua saying, "The Lord our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey." You know, the Lord challenged the Israelites three times in that moment through their leader, Joshua, and three times they made a commitment to give their lives to the Lord.

And that is not only a call for the people of that day, but it is a call for our day. You know, we live in challenging and perilous times, and I know we all know this, but we live in a day when many, many people are saying to the Lord, "We're not going to serve you. We're going to serve the gods of the whatever." And they're not present giving their lives in worship of the Lord every single Sunday.

We are living through a time which is one of the greatest religious movements in this nation's history, but it's going the wrong direction. It's being called the Great De Churching of America. And it's incumbent upon us, and I know I'm preaching to the choir, you're here. And you're giving of your time and your talents and your treasures to the Lord, which I'm extremely grateful that we're in this together.

But we need to be all in in this moment. It's critically important for us to recognize the times in which we live, which is a time of great blessing and beneficence of the Lord upon this country, but also one in which the fabric of those that have given us this would be a little bit vigilant and weary that maybe we might be in jeopardy or in danger of losing it, if we're not careful.

And I'm saying that not just for the nation, but especially for the church. It's time for us as the people of God to recognize that we need to be like the wise virgins in Jesus' parable. We need to have margin in our life for God and be prepared and vigilant and diligent in the giving and the working for the spread of His kingdom in our day.