

Community Service

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[0 : 00] And Kirstie to come and read. So if you'd like to come up the front, you can put your Bibles here and use this. Just hold it up to your mouth so we can all hear.

It's Joshua chapter 24, verses 1 to 13 I'll be reading. That's page 240 on the church Bibles. Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges, and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.

Joshua said to all the people, This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. Long ago your forefathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the river, and worshipped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the river, and led him throughout Canaan, and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Ther to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.

Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. When I brought your fathers out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. But they cried to the Lord for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians. He brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the desert for a long time. I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. When Balak, son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam, son of Beor, to put a curse on you. But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand. Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites,

Gergashites, Hivites, and Jebusites. But I gave them into your hands. I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you. Also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. So I gave you a land in 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.

[2 : 55] Let's continue in verse 14. Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods of your forefathers, worship beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods of your forefathers serve 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. Then the people answered, Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods. It was the Lord, our God himself, who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey, and among all the nations through which we traveled. And the Lord drove out before all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God. Joshua said to the people, You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins.

If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and will make an end of you, after he has been good to you. But the people said to Joshua, No, we will serve the Lord. Then Joshua said, You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord.

Yes, we are witnesses, they replied. Now then, said Joshua, throw away the foreign gods that are among you, and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel. And the people said to Joshua, We will serve the Lord our God and obey him. On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws. And Joshua recorded these things in the book of law of God.

Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak, near the holy place of the Lord. See, he said to all the people, this stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.

Thank you, Jonathan and Kirstie for reading. Let's talk to God, let's pray. As we finish off this great book of Joshua, let's pray together.

[5 : 41] Our Father God, you are very great. You are creator and ruler over our lives. And we are small and insignificant. And we come before you humbly and ask that you would speak to us.

We ask that you would change our lives. That you would cause us to be a people who live in response to you in worship. Teach us what that means. And help us in Jesus' name. Amen.

So all the hard work has been done. Battles have been fought, cities have been captured, and the lands have all been divided. Finally, God's people can sit back and take things easy in the promised land. That's the expectation as we reach the concluding chapter of Joshua chapter 24.

After 600 years of patiently waiting for God's promise to be realized, it seems that at long last they can rest and relax they can rest and relax. Perhaps it's time to build a nice new home along the Mediterranean coast. Maybe to upgrade their car or their chariot or whatever they used.

Join the gym and take a few holidays. But God is not finished with his people. Far from settling down, it's time to start serving. The sight that Joshua has chosen to speak to the people is full of significance. Let's read verse 1. Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. Not just individuals. Everybody was included. All God's people. He summoned the elders, the leaders, the judges, and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. Well, you say, what's significant about that? Well, Shechem was the place where God first met Abraham way back in Genesis chapter 12. It was the place that God spoke promises to Abraham. He said to Abraham all those years ago, I promise you that you will be a great nation. You will have a land in which to live and you will be a blessing.

[8 : 39] Now here they are, 600 years later, gathered together as a nation, gathered together in the land that God had promised to hear Joshua's speech. What's he going to say to them? Well, to our surprise, look at what he does say in verse 14. Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Rather than settling down, it's a time to get up and start serving. The work is just beginning. You see, God has brought his people into the land so that they can bring God to the surrounding nations. They are to serve God by speaking and living the salvation that they've experienced and come to know. They are to begin to live out amongst the people around them. So it's not a case of Israel sitting back and putting the feet up and watching TV. It's a case of God has so blessed you.

Now go and be a blessing to all the other nations. Go and be a blessing to the world. Go and serve your God. So Joshua chapter 24 reminds us that while God has saved us, it's only the start. Our salvation is only the beginning.

He has saved us so that we can go and serve him together as a community wholeheartedly. And sometimes we lose sight of that. We are very individualistic in our thinking about things that I want to do.

There's none of that here. The whole nation of Israel was gathered together. We are all gathered together this morning to hear what God is saying to us together, not individually.

It's a message for his church today. Well, what does he have to say to his church? Well, let's look at what God has done, first of all, his amazing salvation.

[10 : 59] Look at verse 2. Now let's go back in time to where Abraham was.

He was the kind of guy who you would never see in church. If you showed Abraham a Bible, he wouldn't know what it was. Verse 2 tells us that he and his family worshipped other gods.

God wasn't on his radar. He wasn't looking for him and he wasn't wanting him. In fact, Abraham's whole life was lived serving someone else or something else.

Because that's what worship is. That's what it says in verse 2. They worshipped other gods. Worship is not about singing songs and getting excited with the praise time.

As much as it's good to sing, that's not what worship is. Worship is all about what or who you serve.

[12 : 10] What you give your life to. What you give your life to. Or who is most important to you becomes the object of your worship. So, whatever you love the most, whoever you trust the most, that's where you serve.

And for Abraham, it was certainly not the creator god. He had a god of his own invention or making. People of Abraham's culture, well, they depicted everything as a god.

They had hundreds of gods. They had sex gods. They had work gods. They had money gods, nation gods. Gods all over the place. And in reality, all of these different gods were just replacements for the one true god.

They were god substitutes. And that's how Abraham and his family lived. They were ruled by the gods that they made and therefore they worshipped them.

They served them. Now, the problem with worshipping other gods is they're not actually good to you. They enslave you.

[13 : 25] They begin to control you and to consume you. And isn't that what happens when we make money and work and family a god, when we put that as the priority in our lives?

They begin to control your life. They begin to overtake you. And so you live your life for that. And rather than your gods giving you something, they begin to take from you.

They take of your life. They suck you dry. And the trouble with these kind of gods is that you make and create for yourself, they can't free you.

They can't do anything for you. Of course they give us some pleasure for a time, but they're powerless. Rather than save you, they actually enslave you.

And this is the life that Abraham was stuck in. He was living a life where he was worshipping other gods. And it's the kind of life that we're in as well.

[14 : 27] It's how society operates. Oz Guinness, you may have heard of him as a well-known apologist, comes from the great line of the Guinness family.

He wrote in one of his books, No God but God. Listen to this quote. He says, When we cease to worship God, we do not worship nothing.

We worship anything. We don't just eliminate God. We don't just put God to one side. We erect God's substitutes in his place.

A God's substitute can be anything. It can be a physical object, a property. It can be a person, like your spouse.

It can be an activity, like sport. It can be a role, an institution, like church. It can be a hope, an image, like beauty, an idea, or a pleasure, a hero.

[15 : 27] Anything can substitute for God. And so, like Abraham, we need to be people who are set free from the gods that we worship so that we can be free to serve and worship the true living God.

And that's exactly what God did in Abraham's life. Look at verse 3. He says, But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the river and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants.

I gave him Isaac. And to Isaac, I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau. Do you see what's going on here?

It is God who makes the move. He says, I took you, Abraham. God intervenes. God takes the initiative. And when we're stuck worshipping and serving something or someone else, we need somebody from outside to come into our lives, to break into our lives, to free us.

And this is illustrated so well for us in the next few verses. Look at the end of verse 4. We learn that, yes, he had taken Isaac and Jacob and they had had many families, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt where they were enslaved.

[16 : 55] Verse 5. Then I sent Moses and Aaron and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there and I brought you out.

Now not only were they rescued and set free from slavery. Verse 8. I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan.

They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you and you took possession of their land. Look at verse 11.

Keep with me. Then you crossed the Jordan and you came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you as did the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, Jebusites, and all the other ites that there would have been.

And I gave them into your hands. Verse 13. So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build and you live in them and you eat from the vineyards and from the olive groves that you did not plant.

[18 : 08] Do you see what he's saying here? It's crystal clear. Salvation is God's work. We can't free ourselves from our own slavery.

We need God to rescue us. Now I want to drive this home for us this morning because many people like to think that we can free ourselves.

That somehow when it comes to salvation it's our choice and our decision. That we have the power and the resources within ourselves to change us.

But that's not what God is saying. Look at the emphasis. It's all I. I took you. I sent Moses. I brought you into the land.

I fought for you. I delivered you. I gave what you did not have. In other words you cannot save yourself. You can't free yourself.

[19 : 13] Abraham and his family couldn't do it and neither can we. It's not your decision. It's not even your desire.

It's all by God's grace. Now of course some of you will be thinking they're going yeah but don't I decide to follow Jesus?

Yeah I know this thing about God choosing and all the rest of it. But don't I decide to follow Jesus? Don't I decide to be a Christian? Well no you don't decide.

One of the most well-known verses that we often quote from Ephesians 2. It says by grace you have been saved and it's through faith which is the gift of God.

Even faith the faith to believe in God is a gift from God. It comes from Him. And this is the point that He's making. You made no move towards me.

[20 : 12] You were off serving your own gods and doing your own thing but I intervened into your life and caused you. I called you. I chose you. It's all by God's grace. Why?

So that He would humble us. He would remove any ounce of pride any sense of superiority because as soon as I say well I did something or I chose or I responded then we're saying I did something what somebody else can't do.

It removes all pride and all sense of superiority. superiority. But the big point is if God has done this for us as God has intervened into our life if God has saved us and freed us and blessed us then the only reasonable and right response is to give our lives in service to the only true God.

God has done this for you if God has saved us and freed us then the only right response is to give our lives in service to the true God.

So having looked at God's amazing salvation let's look at how we respond our loving service. there's a few things that we need to look at here.

[21 : 39] The first one is choose who you serve. Joshua gives a very simple but yet direct choice to God's people. Look at verse 15.

He says there 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 read that carefully. Look at the verse. Read it carefully. It does not say choose to serve God and then serve nothing.

No it says choose whom you will serve. In other words if you don't serve God you will end up serving someone else or something else.

Because you can't serve nothing. Every one of us are born into this world as servers and worshippers. We all worship someone or something.

[22 : 49] And since we're all very good this morning and we've all gotten out of our beds and we're here in church together and we're reading our Bibles and listening and paying attention we're all going to say I serve God I worship God that's me that's who I've chosen.

But do we? Do we worship God? Do we serve God? Well I help stack up a few chairs and I kind of I do my bit and I serve the tea and coffee and well I'm even there on a Wednesday sometimes handing out the flyers.

I do my bit. But is that it? Is that what service? Is that what worship is? Now I want us to do some really hard self-examination here and I ask myself the same questions.

I'm going to ask two big questions and I want you to think about it very carefully. Here's the first one. It's to find out who we serve.

To find out where our worship is lying. Here's the first question. What is your greatest nightmare? What causes you the most amount of worry?

[24 : 04] Okay? Stay with me. I'm over here. Okay? What's your greatest nightmare? What causes you the most amount of worry? Is it losing your job?

Is it maybe getting cancer? Is it your children's future and what's going to happen then? Is it maybe losing your spouse?

And here's the next question and it's related to it. So you've all got something there that causes you the biggest worry. What do you look to to comfort you or give you happiness when those worries come or when things go wrong in your life?

Where do you look to? What do you go to to give some little comfort to yourself? Is it in relationships? Maybe it's sex. Maybe you run to family.

Maybe it's all about comfort spending and buying yourself little treats. Maybe it's even in religion, in church. Now your answer to those questions will tell you what or who you serve.

[25 : 18] What's most important to you in life? What do you dream about and long for when you're sitting down daydreaming? Where does your mind go to? anything that takes priority over God, anything that is more important to you than God is what we serve.

And the reality is we serve many gods. We worship our job. It consumes us. It's what we live for. We worship our children.

Our children tell us, control us. They absorb us. Our health becomes a God. Our relationships, the need for a partner, the need for a boyfriend or a girlfriend or a wife or a husband, that becomes the priority and the goal of our life.

And God gets pushed out. As we said earlier in the quote, God is eliminated. We push him to one side and we erect God's substitutes.

Something to take the place of God. Something that we look to for our meaning and our purpose. So there's a challenging question, verse 15. In the light of God's amazing salvation, choose who you will serve.

[26 : 41] Is it the God who frees you or the gods that fail you? So choose who you serve.

Second, know the cost. God's God. Because serving God is not going to be easy. This next point is an attempt to stop anybody from becoming a Christian.

You've heard me. It costs your life. It's serious if you are going to be a Christian. Verse 16.

The people answered, far be it for us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods. Verse 19. Then Joshua said to the people, you're not able to serve the Lord.

He is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve other gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you after he has been good to you.

[27 : 48] You see, serving God is serious. It's not for half-hearted people. We can't treat God with an attitude that says something like this, sure, God is loving and forgiving.

It really doesn't matter how I treat God and, well, if I want to live my life this way and God is second best, that's okay because God always forgives us, doesn't he?

He's kind and compassionate and gracious and, well, God may be forgiving, but it doesn't give us a right to abuse his forgiveness or take it for granted.

And I think Joshua is putting it up to them. He's challenging them and he's putting it up to us as well as we listen in. It requires careful thinking for each one of us to respond.

He's challenging us of the cost. Can you do it? He is a great God. God, can you give your life to him? But yet he's urging us on in his commitment.

[28 : 53] You can't serve him. You can't serve this God. Yes, we can. He's urging them on in their commitment. Isn't that exactly what Jesus said?

Let me read to you from Mark's Gospel. Jesus said, whoever wants to save his life will lose it.

Whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it. What good is it for a person to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul?

What can a person give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me, says Jesus, and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, then I will be ashamed of him when he comes in my Father's glory.

Before we start making great and grand promises, before we start waving our flags around and saying, oh, I'm going to serve the Lord, or I'm committed to him, know the cost of serving a God who saves.

[30 : 11] It's serious. It costs your life. The third thing there then is, know the cost. Second, deal with your gods.

If we're going to choose to serve God, we must first deal with our God substitutes that we have in our lives. Look at verse 14, he says, fear the Lord, serve him with all faithfulness, throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped.

And the people, verse 21, the people said to Joshua, we will serve the Lord. Then Joshua said, you are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord.

Yes, we are witnesses, they replied. Now then, said Joshua, throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.

This is a call to repentance and faith. We are first of all to repent. That means we are to turn from the things that we worship and serve.

[31 : 22] Look at what it says, verse 23, throw away your gods. we must take active steps to remove whatever it is that has become the priority in our life and replace it with God.

The answer to the questions that we gave earlier, what is that thing that drives you? What is it that consumes your thinking? Put it to one side and replace it with God, the only true God.

Repent. second, we must have faith. That means that in trusting, that means that trusting in God, we have everything that we need.

Look at verse 23 again, it says, yield your hearts to the Lord. When we worship God, when He alone is our object of trust, when He alone is the person we look to for our confidence, we will find that He fills us, that He satisfies us, that He frees us.

If everything in your life that surrounds your life, if all of that was to be zapped in one moment, all taken from you, lose your job, lose your health, lose your family, and all you're left with is God, and you can still say, He is my everything.

[32 : 48] I am completely satisfied and content because I have God. in Him we rest. And here is a double action to deal with our gods.

Throw away your gods and yield your hearts to the Lord. Now we need to take time to think this through. What is it that controls us?

What is it that you're building your life around? What right now is your number one desire or priority? What's the dream that you have for life?

If it's not God and His glory, deal with it now. Deal with it now. I think we all, myself included, need to repent and have faith.

look at verse 25. On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people and I'll read again, sorry.

[34 : 02] On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws. He's saying to the people, if you keep your promise, if you keep your promise to serve God as you have said, then blessing will come to you.

But if you break your promise, if you fail to serve, then curses will fall on you. That's what's going on here, verse 26. And Joshua recorded these things in the book of the law of God and he took up a large stone and he set it up under the oak near the holy place of the Lord.

See, he said to all the people, this stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. In other words, it serves as a reminder of what's going on here.

It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God. At the very site where God made and kept his promise, the people now make their promise to serve God.

But you know something about this promise? It's terrifying. It's really terrifying. terrifying. Because if they break their promise, if they are untrue to God, if they should fail and begin to serve other gods, then look what happens.

[35 : 23] Look back at verse 20. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you.

That's why it's terrifying. And we know the sad history as we read on through our Bibles. That Israel made this great promise, oh, we will serve you, oh, we will give our lives to you, oh, we will never turn to anybody else.

And they failed. They were untrue. And disaster did come. And they ended up in exile. And the curse of God fell on that nation.

And you know what? We are no better. Don't we replace God with God's substitutes? Haven't we all made promises?

Haven't we? We all make promises, I'm going to serve God, I'm going to do this, and we fail. And we fail. And it seems that serving this God is an impossible task for us to do.

[36 : 40] But God knows our hearts. He knows that we are just like Abraham that we read at the beginning, that we worship other gods and we can't save ourselves.

so that the God that deserves our service, the God who deserves our worship, comes down to serve us.

The God who made us and deserves our worship, bowed before us. The God who rules over all served us by dying for us.

He worshipped by obeying his father's call and going to the cross. And the curse and the disaster that should fall on us fell on God so that the blessings might come to us.

That the blessings might come to us that we might be able to go and serve God without fear, without condemnation, in complete joy.

[37 : 42] Tell me, the gods that we have, the gods that we worship, the gods that we serve, would they die for you? The gods that we make and create, do they love you and would they give their life for you?

In your minds, look at the one and only true God as he hangs on the cross, broken for you, destroyed for you, crushed for you under the weight of God's curse.

As we create God's substitute, he becomes our substitute. In your mind, see the love and the grace and the mercy as blood flows from his hands and from his feet and from his head and his side.

Hear him as he cries out on the cross in agony and pain. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He came to serve you. He came to die for me and for you.

And listen to his promise that all who come to him will not die but will live. This God served you and this God saved you.

[39 : 13] How can we not give our lives in service to such a great God? Let's just take time to be quiet before we sing our closing song.

There's a lot to think through, a lot to contemplate. but we're just going to have a moment's quietness now. An opportunity for us to think about the gods that we serve and worship.

where do we need to repent? Ask God to forgive you and to replace those gods with the one and true living God.

God. our Father God, may you be our priority.

May you be our desire. May you be what controls us and consumes us every day. Forgive us, Lord, for the times we put job and family, even church and other things and people in front of you.

[41 : 13] Help us to serve you and to worship you as we ought. To center our hearts around you and to make you the focus of our lives.

Teach us what it is to serve you. Thank you that we can serve you. Thank you that Jesus died to take the blame for all of our failure so that we can now go and serve you without fear and in complete joy.

Thank you for Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.