

Joshua 24, Dedication Service, 10/2/22

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Preacher: Romell Williams

[0 : 00] Every head bowed, every eye closed. God of grace and God of glory, we do praise and magnify your name.

Lord, I thank you. For yet another opportunity to stand before your presence, to preach your word to your people.

I pray now, Father, that you would not allow me to speak as a mere man, but rather as an oracle of Christ. Use these lips of clay to speak a word of hope to the sinner.

Speak a word of healing to the sick. And to speak a word of help to the saints. Oh God, forgive me of my sins.

Cleanse me anew and anoint me afresh. Hide me behind your cross. So that you and you alone might be glorified.

[1 : 24] Let the words of my mouth. And the meditations of my heart. Be acceptable in thy sight. Oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

It's in the powerful and perfect name of Jesus that we pray. Thank God. Amen. Amen. Well, this is the day that the Lord hath made.

We should rejoice and be glad in it. I am so grateful and so thankful to be a part of this celebration, to have been invited here by my friend and brother, Pastor Dave Helm, to share with you in this season of celebration.

Let's praise God again for what he has done through the Christ Church staff, under the leadership of Pastor Helm. I preached in this room before.

It looked like it does now. And we are grateful. So grateful to have with me the Progression Church family. You all wave at me so I can see where you are.

[2 : 41] Amen. I want y'all to see where they are. They may be a little noisy tonight, but we're going to make it through together. So grateful to see Sister Helm and all of my friends and family members.

Grateful to have my wife and my two spies with me on tonight. Amen. I covered your prayers tonight.

I typically don't have to be assigned text to preach. That seems to be the way of the world when you're hanging out with Dave Helm.

Amen. Tonight, I want to lift for our consideration Joshua chapter 24 in its entirety.

Joshua chapter 24 in its entirety. Remain standing for the reading of the word so that if the sermon doesn't go well, at least I can say I had them on their feet.

[3 : 50] Joshua chapter 24. Here's how my Bible reads. Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel.

And they presented themselves before God. 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 of Nahor. And they served other gods. 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. 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.

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.

[5 : 09] 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.

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. 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.

Then Balak, the son of Zephor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel. And he sent and invited Balaam, the son of Beor, to curse you.

[6 : 12] But I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand. 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 Jubasites.

And I gave them into your hand. 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 your bow. 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. Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness.

[7 : 24] Put away the gods of your fathers, your father served beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve.

Whether the gods of your father, the gods your father 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.

Then the people answered, far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods.

For it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers 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 and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land.

Therefore, we will serve the Lord for he is our God. But Joshua said to the people, you are not able to serve the Lord for he is a holy God.

[8 : 53] He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. 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.

The people said to Joshua, no, but we will serve the Lord. Then Joshua said to the people, you are witnesses against yourself that you have chosen the Lord to serve him.

And they said, we are witnesses. He said, then put away the foreign gods that are among you and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel.

And the people said to Joshua, the Lord, our God, we will serve and his voice we will obey. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem.

And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.

[10 : 14] 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. So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.

After these things, Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord died, being 110 years old, and they buried him in his own inheritance at Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the Mount of Gash.

Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the works that the Lord did for Israel.

As for the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of money.

[11 : 42] It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph. And Eleazar, the son of Aaron, died, and they buried him at Gibeah, the town of Phinehas, his son, which had been given him in

the hill country of Ephraim.

Once again, in your hearing for emphasis, verses 14 and 15, say, Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness.

Put away the gods that your father served beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods of your fathers, your father 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. I want to label the message tonight faithing forward.

You may be seated in the presence of our God. Faithing forward. The State of the Union address is an annual message delivered by the President of the United States to a joint session of the United States Congress near the beginning of each calendar year on the current condition of the nation.

[13:20] State of the Union generally includes reports on the nation's budget, news, agenda, achievements, and the President's priorities and legislative proposals.

During most of the country's first century, the President primarily submitted only a written report to Congress. But after 1913, Woodrow Wilson, the 28th United States President, began the regular practice of delivering the address to Congress in person as a way to rally support for the presidential agenda.

With the advent of radio and television, the address is now broadcast live in all U.S. time zones on multiple networks.

Joshua chapters 23 and 24 record for us the Bible's equivalent to the State of the Union address. It's not made by the President at the outset of a new year, but rather by the prophetic conqueror Joshua at the close of his own life and ministry.

[14:47] It's not to the children of Israel. He summons all the leaders and the citizens of the nation to Shechem, a place of sacred significance to give a full update of who they are, where they had come from, how they had made it, and what they must do in order to ensure the continuation of their blessed existence in the future.

Chapter 24 records for us the final portion of this farewell sermon, which involved a history lesson, a call to commitment, a warning, a covenant renewal, and finally, an obituary section.

These fascinating final moments offer us insight into the reality that with God, every conclusion is another commencement.

commitment. That is to say that while Joshua was signing off, his great desire was that the nation would sign again on the dotted line and give full consent to keep safe things forward with God.

Today, I stand to invite everyone present to do the same. This moment of dedication because God, this moment of dedication is, because of God, both a conclusion and a commitment.

[16:49] The physical work is done, but now the spiritual work must continue toward completion on the day of Jesus Christ.

Here we are, Christ Church, after more than 20 years of labor in this community and city standing at the precipice of something new, something more, something else.

And we must now gain clear perspective in order to let God's activity in the past and the present empower, embolden, and enliven our commitment to trust him for the future.

I want to submit today that when we consider what is said and what is done in Joshua chapter 24, we learn this, that the absolute faithfulness of God demands that we live forward with exclusive faith in God.

Oh, I like the way that sounds. I want to play it for you again. The absolute faithfulness of God demands that we live forward with exclusive faith in God.

[18:29] Question on the table today that I want to ask and answer is simply this. What can we learn this day from Joshua's invitation to faith forward with God that day?

You see, Joshua gathers all the people at Shechem. I could hear Dave saying Shechem in my head.

He would have hung out there homiletically, so let me do that for a moment. You know, Shechem is the spot where God caught up with Abraham.

Shechem is the location where Jacob set up an altar. Shechem is the place that Joshua went to plaster the law on stones.

Shechem is the vicinity where the very word of God was initially read. This is a very special place because what God originated with Abraham, he now many, many years later brings full circle.

[19 : 53] The nation is a reality. The land has been conquered. The blessings have been experienced. And now it's time for a new commitment to be made.

Joshua intends to challenge the nation to the necessity of serving God exclusively based on who he is and what he's done for them.

Comprehensive consideration of Joshua 24 offers us four actions that must be taken as we seek to faith forward with God.

I want to give you them and I'll get in my seat. Note first of all, verses 2-13 say to us that faithing forward requires that we look back at our history.

Their personal history was vivid proof that God had been faithful. That this is awe inspiring because what Joshua does in these verses is give a dramatic sweeping exposition of Israel's history.

[21 : 23] He's not concerned with every little detail. What he is concerned with is inserting his hearers into the story so that over and over again where he should be saying they, he's saying you.

Even deeper here, Joshua is concerned with these people know that this history lesson is not informational is theological.

That the point to their backstory isn't them, it's God. When you read the text, which I just took all that time to read, here's what you discover.

That 17 times in 10 verses, God uses the personal pronoun I.

He says, I took, I gazed, I sent, I brought in, I destroyed, I delivered, and the point is this, everything they had was because of God.

[22 : 55] All of the progress they had made was because of God. All of the growth they had experienced was because of God. All of the advancements that they enjoyed was because of God.

Oh, they're shouting stuff tonight as we sit in a new sanctuary. That's enough to make you get excited. That's enough to make the preacher fall off the wagon and not finish the rest of the sermon.

Oh, that you are Christ church. It's not because of you. It's because of God. And here's what I need to tell you that you got to learn how to glance into life's rearview mirror.

Not to rehearse what happened, but just to see what God has done. God. Oh, I wish I had help in the room.

Is there anybody in here other than me that has to sit by yourself sometimes and write down or type in on a piece of paper what the Lord has done for you?

[24 : 11] And you've got to join in with the psalmist and declare if it had not been for the Lord that was on our side. Where would we be?

Yeah, faithing forward requires that you look back at your history. But secondly, faithing forward requires that you look around at your choices.

You see, based on the past, no other God deserved their allegiance. Joshua says to them, that you need to serve the Lord in reverent fear and complete devotion.

When you reread the text, please lean into the fact that the refrain over and over again is this command, this invitation to serve the Lord.

But listen, as Joshua says, these are your choices. Old idols from the wrong side of the river or the new idols from the people you dispossessed.

[25 : 33] Before you pick, remember that only one God is alive and only one God is able to do what has been done.

I hope you get this. These are your choices. Faithfulness or falsehood. Omnipotence or impotence. God or society. The failed things that people trust in or God's eternal word.

You've got to make your choice. What are you going to believe in and who are you going to serve? I love this because he's not talking to unbelievers. He's talking to the nation of Israel.

[26 : 40] They had already trusted God. But based on what they had been through and based on, watch this, the trouble that rest often affords our faith.

You see, faith is easy to keep when you're fighting. But it's just like a muscle. It'll get flimsily and lethargic when the wars are over.

Here's what Joshua's calling for. He's saying, that there's about to be a transition. And in the language of social media, this transition demands a status update.

Maybe you've been on Facebook and Instagram and all that other stuff for many years, but every now and then, when something new happens in your life, you got to go on and update your status

so that the people who see you understand where you are now, where you stand now, who you're committed to now.

And Joshua says, before you fix your status, let me give you mine. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

[28 : 14] God, I wonder, is there anybody in the room today that showed up to do a status update and testify, ask for me and my house.

We will serve the Lord. Here's all I'm trying to tell you. Real faith demands that we choose God over and over again.

That the day that you got convicted and converted was just your first opportunity to pick Jesus. But if you keep walking, life is going to put you in some new spaces.

Life is going to stand you in front of some new faces and you've got to keep choosing God over and over again.

Listen, faithing forward means that you've got to look back at your history. You've got to look around at our choices, but then it means that you've got to look up at your only option.

[29 : 31] That's verses 19 to 28. God's holiness demanded their full consent to keeping his word. Joshua offers them an abrasive warning in this text.

He says, listen, this ain't new news, but I need to say it. You're in over your heads. You are sinful people with a holy God.

you need to be warned that this same God that worked for you will declare you enemies if you try to hold on to your idols.

I don't know who I'm preaching to tonight, but the Lord does. This severe abrasive warning seems to picture a God of unforgiving character.

God of God of God of God of forgive. He's trying to warn them against sliding back into idolatry.

[30 : 43] He's trying to tell them before I die, you better get this stuff straight. Unclutter your tent and unclutter your heart.

That's God's word for somebody in the room tonight, that we are in this room as proof that God is at work in this ministry. And in response, you need to unclutter your tent and unclutter your heart.

Whatever idols you've allowed to creep in, whatever idols you've been bending your knee to, they need to be kicked out and gotten rid of.

This is powerful because what happens here is new vows and a new monument.

You know what this is? It's a wedding renewal ceremony. I learned firsthand the power of a wedding renewal ceremony 21 years ago in 2001 when after 25 years of marital bliss, my parents, Reverend Romel Williams Sr.

[32 : 16] and Barbara Williams decided to renew their vows. Oh, this was a powerful moment in the life of our family because the children that were just a gleam in dad's eye were now standing at the altar to re-hear him make the same commitment not to a different bride but to the same one.

Oh, how powerful it is to look in the face of the same object of affection and say, I've loved you, but I still love you.

I wanted you, but I still want you. I've needed you, but I still need you. And that's what happens in this text.

These people have had their information updated and their memories refreshed by Joshua's sermon so much so that when they repeat their commitment, they don't repeat what he said verbatim, but they check off all the categories.

He found us. He brought us. He kept us. Yes, he is our God and we will continue to be his people.

[33 : 55] But listen, there aren't just new vows. there's a new monument. That's what excited me when my parents got remarried. They decided to exchange new wedding rings.

The old rings were traditional. A little band. A little diamond. But these new rings were identical and they were written in Egyptian hieroglyph.

here's what they said. God's love restored us. Can I tell you that the message on their ring is the very message in this text that this people was still our people because God's love had kept them. God's love had defended them. God's love had provided it for them. You got to look back at your history.

You got to look around at your options. Look around at your choices. You got to look up and realize that God himself is your only true option.

[35 : 16] But let me close fourthly and finally tell you that you got to look on with hope. These three deaths proved that with God they could have hope beyond the grave.

I'm out of time but I'm not out of sermon. I want to tell you that we have now arrived at the obituary section of Joshua chapter 24 and here in the obituary section there are three entries Joshua himself Joseph and a man by the name of Eleazar who was the high priest.

Joshua represents for us the hope of righteous influence that he served God in such a way that as long as the people who knew him and knew God were breathing the nation stayed faithful.

Oh what a testimony that is. That ought to be our heart's desire that as long as the people who know us and know God are still breathing, those connected stay faithful.

You know the rest of the story. Israel would fail. In fact, we wouldn't even have a book of judges if they had lived up completely to what they promise here.

[37 : 00] but the good news is that Joshua's righteous influence out breathed his last breath.

Not only is there the hope of righteous influence, but there's also the hope of a fulfilled promise. many years earlier, Joseph asked his brothers, he said, the Lord is going to visit us and when he gets us out of Egypt, don't leave my bones here.

That's a whole other sermon that will get me to crying and shouting up here because the Hebrew writer picks up on Joseph's faith and says, here is a man who before he died understood that he had to work in Egypt, but he believed he had been created for Canaan.

And he said, when God comes to get us, don't you leave my bones here. Here we are with the testimony that Joseph's bones are now buried in Shechem as proof positive that our God is a promise keeper.

[38 : 23] Doesn't matter how long it takes, doesn't matter how far he's got to travel, doesn't matter how much it costs, God will keep his promises.

There's the hope of righteous influence, the hope of fulfilled promises, but then Eleazar the high priest.

He's been integral. Check out his name, but he passes on and he marks the shift of a generation. There's not just the hope of righteous influence and the hope of fulfilled promises, but listen to me on the other side of a pandemic as I point out to you, the hope changing times.

Praise God today that trouble don't last always. Praise God today that no matter how dark the night may get, the sun will shine again.

[39 : 30] Now I got to close. I won't admit this to you, Dave, it's been hard trying to find my way to the cross that there's so many Easter eggs in Joshua 24, but I decided I'd lean in here.

I thought it significant that Joshua in his death is called finally the servant of God.

Moses was called the servant of God in his death, but here's what I want to point you to. You see, the lesser Joshua is verified here in the obituary section, but the greater Joshua, the Lord Jesus Christ, gets glorified as God's servant when he dies.

Acts chapter 3 verse 13 says, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate when he had decided to release him.

The good news is this, that all of the servants that littered the Old Testament were just pointing us forward to that ultimate servant, the one who bought it, an old rugged cross, one dark Friday, who was hung high, stretched wide, and dropped low, the one who granddaddy said, got up early on Sunday morning with all power in his hands.

[41 : 23] Thank God for the testimony that the greater Joshua was glorified in his death.

Faithing forward means you got to look back at your history, got to look around at your choices, you got to look up and remember that God is your only option, but you got to look on with all your hope.

I don't know about you, but I've decided to put all my hope in the greater servant. I'm in my seat tonight when I tell you that my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and his righteousness.

I dare not trust the sweetest strength, but wholly lead on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid rock I stand, all on the ground is sinking safe.

All on the ground is sinking safe.