

Choose!

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Date: 31 May 2009

[0:00] Joshua 24, verse 14 to 15, then verses 22 to 24.

Joshua 24, verse 14, it says, And then verse 22, And the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. It says there, Joshua's talking to the folk, and he's recounting God's dealings with the children of Israel, with God's people.

He recounts God's dealings to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. In the context here, he talks about God's deliverance as the people of God were delivered through the Red Sea, out of Egypt, through that wilderness time, of God's faithfulness, of God's victories against the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Jebusites and all the otherites.

He gave them great victory through that travelling time. And of God's blessings too, in verse 13 here it says, Now sometimes we can take for granted all of God's manifold blessings, can't we?

[2:32] How he's been so faithful to us, how he's blessed us over our lives. And Joshua now issues to the folk a challenge, a challenge to them, a command really.

In verse 14, And in verse 15, He says, Choose you this day, whom you will serve.

It's a call for us all, isn't it? Choose you this day, whom you will serve. He gives the folk a challenge that really, they could serve the gods of the world, of the world around them, the lost, the godless ones, the gods of the heathen.

Or, he says, you've got the choice. Serve them, or serve the Lord. It's a clear cut choice, isn't it? There's a line in the sand.

It's a choice. And that's what I want to impress tonight on everyone here, that we all have that choice. You know, the son that, Believe and teach that man doesn't get a choice.

[3:55] But I think it's very plain from the scriptures that there is always a challenge. God urges us to choose. He gives us the ability to choose.

To choose life, or to choose death. To choose Christ, or to choose to be Christless. And it's a clear cut decision. It's a choice that all of us individually need to make.

Who are we going to serve? Who are we going to belong to? Who are we going to live for? And he makes a bold statement. For he and his house, he says, But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

And the people said unto Joshua, verse 24, The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. Now, Joshua issued, as I say, a three-fold challenge here.

And we'll look at that challenge that he gave to the folk there in verse 14 of Joshua 24. Number one, he says, fear the Lord. Verse 19, it says that God is holy.

[5:02] He is a holy God. He's a jealous God. God doesn't want us to toy around and to pretend to be his when we're really not. God is holy.

He's jealous. He's got a devotion to you. And yet, sometimes we lack that, don't we? When, in contrast, do we treat him lightly?

Now, some people treat holy things lightly and carelessly. Do we disregard his greatness and his judgment? Do we treat his word flippantly, like we don't really care what he says?

Or do we take it to our heart and take it seriously? Do we act irreverently and carelessly with his promptings, with his urgings, with the conviction that he puts on our heart?

Fear God and you'll have nothing else to fear. If we fear him, we're in his perfect will, aren't we? We're in that place where he wants us to be.

[6:04] And the question for everyone here is, do you truly fear him? Fear him. It's a fearful thing, it says, to fall into the hands of the living God.

To be unprepared. To be facing his judgment. And I think sometimes we, all of us, as a church, we need that holy desperation.

That devotion that he wants us to have. To fear him. To trust him no matter what. To hunger and thirst and long for his way for us.

And to travail. In the word it talks about not only people going witnessing, which in itself is a challenge, but to travail. You know, Paul talked about travailing for some, didn't he?

As he brought them to birth spiritually. It's a soul travail, isn't it? As we think of ones in our circle that are not saved. That we long for them to be saved.

[7:05] We're concerned for them. We fear for them and are worried for them when they're lost. Do we have that kind of travail? That kind of longing? That wanting for others to have a closer walk and for us to have that?

Where is the fear of God? God, it's something that we need to have, isn't it? To be serious about the Almighty. He's Almighty. And we should respect him.

And if we fear God, we'll not trifle with sin. We'll not toy with that. We'll be sure to obey him. And we'll stop playing games. And we'll have that greater sense of who he is and what he wants for us. And we won't want to have that conformity with the world. You know, there's a sense where we can so easily just be conformed to the world around us.

And what the world would have for us. It's like sometimes we can get acclimatized by the world.

You know, it's been said, like, for example, when you enter into a dark building, for example, when you're going, for example, going into a movie theater, you'll remark how dark it is.

[8:15] But then when you've sat there for a while, you'll go accustomed to that light, to that level of darkness. And it won't seem as dark as when you first walked into that room.

And sometimes, too, with sin, we can be around the world and its influence. And you think of television or whatever influences are about us that really emanate from the world.

We do get desensitized. We can grow accustomed to it so that it doesn't strike us as strongly as it did when we might have first seen such a thing. Because we're growing more conscious of it and less conscious of what God's view of it would be.

Can't we? And that's the danger, isn't it? It's like, you know, the story of the frog in the kettle, isn't it? Where they're in the kettle and the water gets turned up hotter and hotter and they don't realize it, they get cooked to death.

And that's what can happen, I suppose, is we sometimes are in the world, but we're not of the world. But sometimes the world's influence does affect us. It's like with Lot, isn't it?

[9:24] When Lot was near Sodom, he kind of grew accustomed to it. And he ended up living in the very city of Sodom. And we see the danger that faced him and his family as he was in that place.

And sometimes, too, when we're in the world, we can get that conformity to the world. It's been said that the major reason for teenage suicide and drug addiction and alcoholism is that most young people are conformists.

So in other words, they just follow the crowd. They follow the crowd, the peer pressure, and they do what everybody else does. Everybody else. They just join in the crowd and join and follow the crowd.

If everybody else is doing it, then it must be good to do. In effect, they act like sheep. And there's a story told about sheep that when the slaughterhouses, you know, the abattoirs, want sheep to be gathered together and going down the track to the slaughterhouse, that what they apparently do is the sheep are all penned up in a big, large pen, and there's a narrow ramp.

And what the abattoir folk do or did at one time, they train a goat. And they call it a Judas goat, apparently.

[10:49] A Judas goat. And this Judas goat is trained to lead the sheep up the ramp to their death. So the goat is placed among the sheep, and then the goat walks confidently up the ramp as the nervous sheep watch around because they usually just scatter and kind of bumble around the sheep.

But then when they see this goat walk confidently up the ramp, they just follow the Pied Piper. They follow the Judas goat. And as soon as it's got about five feet up the ramp, it just stops, confidently

looks around at the nervous sheep, and they just begin to follow.

And near the top of the ramp, then the goat turns to the left as the gate is open just for him and then closed. And then the sheep continue up the ramp and turn right to their death.

It's a telling story, isn't it? Of conformity. And we're in a world where the world wants to conform us, but Christ wants to transform us, to be transformed by the renewing of our mind.

And that's the challenge for us. Do we fear the Lord? Do we want God's way? Or are we just going to follow the ground to our destruction? And when we fear God, something happens.

[11:56] There's a change. Number two, in Joshua's challenge, he says, fear the Lord. Secondly, he says, serve Him in sincerity and in truth. Do we truly serve Him, to serve Him?

Are we truly willing to be His servants? And if He is really, as we sometimes glibly call Him, Lord and Master, that means you're His servant. That means you're at His bidding, at His beck and call. And ministry means serving. And there's ministry for all of us. There's lots of serving to do. A lot of people aspire to the ministry. But it's not about having some kind of position of recognition.

It's about doing the work that needs to be done. It's about all of us pulling together. And that we've had that stamina. That get up and go. And that keep on keeping on and going.

And ministry hurts. It costs. It's a sacrifice for all of us, whatever it be, that we might spend our time doing this. Lots of things we could devote our time to. Even tonight, you're here tonight to fellowship.

[12:59] That's a ministry unto the Lord. It's a ministry so that people are sitting next to you, that you can encourage by your presence here tonight. And I thank you for being here. On what is a cold night, there's a certain level of discomfort.

But when we want to belong to the Lord Jesus, we want to serve Him. We want to be about His service. And it can hurt when you serve. You know, when young people's ministry, Sunday school, the youth group, even driving the buses, sometimes there's challenges.

And our spirits can flag. We can get tired. We can get our nerves frayed. And sometimes it seems like the elements are against us, all the things that are against us. When resources dwindle.

When criticism abounds. When opposition thrives. When problems multiply. When we look at how much we are giving up and losing. When common sense says, go the easy path.

When common sense would say, take the easy road. Ministry can be a challenge and that can affect all of us. It hurts when people let you down. When leaven gets in the lung.

[14:04] When the sin infecting the church. When there's Christians that are faithless and unbelieving. When Christians are unfaithful, unreliable. We aren't talking here about lip service.

This is serving the Lord. This is serving the only one who's worth serving. We aren't talking here about pray this prayer and then carry on living in sin. This is about serving Him wholeheartedly. That's what the Christian life means. It means a transformation. It means a conversion. It means that we give our whole heart devotedly. And Joshua makes the claim here. He says, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

This is what we are going to do. We're committed to this. We will serve the Lord. Is your home one which the master is the master of? Who rules your family?

To serve the Lord means to obey Him. It means that we want to follow our master's instructions to do His will, to obey His commands. And serving the Lord, it means allowing Him to take control.

[15:07] And really for the Lord to take us over. When we might help those that others might discount. Or, you know, the youngsters that others might not bother about. That if Christ was here, He would be bothered about them.

And if they want to be here, then by His grace and help, we'll do what we can to minister to them. Whilst we know some of them, they need time out because they're too challenging.

They disrupt the rest of them. But God will give us the grace and help and wisdom to manage those that He gives to us in our charge. And it's a blessing, isn't it? It's a privilege to have that time to be able to minister to them.

It's wonderful that young people want to be here tonight. It's a blessing to me that you're here tonight. And I pray that you'll be encouraged too. That the Lord Jesus would want you to be here

tonight.

To hear the Word. To take it in. And help it work in your hearts. And when we've ministered to, let's have the attitude of a man called George Whitefield. An old-time preacher.

[16:06] He said this. He said, Let the name of Whitefield perish, but Christ be glorified. And let me be but the servant of all. He didn't want to have George Whitefield ministries.

He didn't want the Whitefieldites to be following him in time to come. He just wanted his name to perish, but that Christ's name would be glorified. That there would be something of Christ for Christ. For Christ's glory to remain at the end of his life. And that he would be a servant of all. Another story here. Many years ago, a humble pastor served a church in a little country town.

His ministry was quiet. And few souls were brought to Christ there. Year in and year out, the work became more and more discouraging. It was only years later that the faithful minister found great joy in the knowledge that one of those he had won to Christ was Charles Spurgeon.

Hallelujah. A man who later was used by God to bring multitudes to his son. And humble service is rewarded now. And certainly will be rewarded even more when Christ comes.

[17:13] We don't know the impact we can have. I know some of you work with intellectually disabled people. That's a challenge. That's a ministry in itself. And working in whatever workplace you might come across.

It's a harvest field. Wherever you work. Wherever you live and move and do your shopping. You know, wherever you live and go about your day-by-day lives. In the schoolyard. In the workplace.

You are his minister. You are his servant. In that mission field. In that capacity. So, have that attitude of service like Whitfield had. That the glory goes to him. Let Christ be glorified.

And like that Japanese missionary. Where would Christ be today? What would Christ be doing?

Who would Christ be reaching out to? And those are the ones that we want to, by his grace, be his hand extended today.

And some today, they serve the Lord insincerely. And not truthfully. Let's not treat our serving God lightly. And let's take it seriously.

[18:14] God's given you a talent. Seek to employ that talent. For his glory. And to not be careless. To not tolerate sin with your life.

And how is your heart? Is it defiled? Or is it clean? God wants you to be clean. To be used by him. To be used for his glory. And so, we've seen the fear of the Lord.

We've seen the serving of the Lord. And thirdly, Joshua says, put away the other gods. We can all be sometimes torn between the gods of this world. We can be influenced by the gods of this world.

Even without realising it. Because we're living in a world where the media, when the world philosophies are all around us. And abounding and projected towards us.

Marketing the gods of this world. All about us. There's a study Bible that says, It is not a godless society, but a society full of gods. Pleading for our attention.

[19:11] We're living in a society that's full of gods. You know, we think of it, in a way, it is godless. Because without our God. But it is a society that's full of gods.

Of other gods. Think of the other gods that are around about us. And whether they're still part of our life. Do some things still stick with us, which are part of our old ways?

Do we have other loves that take his place? Think of these plenty of other gods. For example, these substitutes, these false gods. They take his place. Things like, as the world would pay homage to, and revere and honour.

Things such as the almighty dollar. The world we live in, it pays homage to the almighty dollar. The lure of materialism and money. The lust for recognition and fame.

The god of self. You know, they think that self-confidence or self-esteem is such a thing to aspire to. And yet they don't think of anything to do with esteeming God.

[20:13] Of honouring God. He is the one worthy of our esteem. Of our value. The gods of pride and passion. Of dare I say it, sport.

And nationalism. Oh, might have touched a holy cow there tonight. The sports of this world can sometimes be a god. Can't they? And there's nothing wrong with being a sports fan.

But when that's the all-consuming love of our life. And when that's what obsesses us and possesses our thinking. And our sense of what's important. Then it's a danger, isn't it? And these are all things. Gods that will disappoint. Gods that will disappoint. They will distract. They will deceive. Gods that will hinder. Hinder. Harass. And take loved ones to hell. When they take his place. That's the danger, isn't it? We don't want whatever pursuits we might have in our life. We don't want any of those things to take his place.

[21:12] That's the danger. Of course we know in the Ten Commandments. That thou shalt have no other God before me. No other God. There should be no other love.

That is taking his rightful place. Joshua said. He talked about the other gods. He said. The gods which the Amorites were serving.

The gods of the Egyptians. The gods of. The people before the flood. On the other side of the flood. The gods of the Egyptians. The gods of the Amorites.

The gods of the Australians. Well, that's not in there. But I think that's the kind of meaning there, isn't it? That we could take in a way. It doesn't say the gods of the Australians.

But you could think in a way. That if it was written for today. That you could think. What are the gods of the Australians? You could think, for example. Of the gods of Australia.

[22:11] The gods of Australia. He says that. You know. In a sense we could think. Are we following the gods of the other nations? Or the gods of our world. That we're living in?

Or are we following the true God? We should put away other gods. It says. And the real God wants to save us. He wants to save us. He wants to be real and meaningful. And genuine in our lives.

He wants to save us from sin. He wants to save us from slavery. Like he saved the people of God out of Egypt. He wants to save us to serve. To work. To labour. To live for him.

With meaningful purpose and activity. And when we think of the gods of this world. Really they're kind of like a substitute for the real thing. It's like you could think of how when I know with my garden.

Not that I'm much of a gardener. But you see a tree. And it looks like it's all nice and healthy. But sometimes when the season comes. When the leaves all fall off. There's hidden underneath that lush green foliage.

[23:12] There's a parasitic plant. Called mistletoe. Who's ever heard about that? You know the birds come and peck those seeds. I know Neil would know.

Being in the council in the gardening section. The birds come and they peck the little seed pot. Or whatever don't they. And then it grows into the tree. And it becomes a parasite. It might look nice and green and lush.

As part of the tree. But really it's killing the tree. It's a parasitic plant. It's slowly sucking away some of the tree's vitality. And maybe that can be true for us.

As Christians. That little piece of mistletoe comes. And those hidden sins. Those things that slowly suck away our spiritual vitality. And whilst they may not at times be evident.

That they're taking away that inner spiritual health. That fruitfulness that God wants for us. Those parasites. Those sinful habits. Those other gods. That can take our Lord's rightful place.

[24:10] And ask the Lord to reveal that to you. If there might be some mistletoe. So to speak in your life. And put away the other gods. Throw them away. Hack that mistletoe off.

And cut it away. Because it's damaging you. It cuts yourself off. From the world's gods. And we must. We must separate ourselves from idols. It's like termites. Like white ants. In a piece of wood. They draw away the energy. They draw away the vitality. And maybe other gods can be like termites. Like decay in your life. That they might be sapping away the spiritual life.

The vitality that Christ wants you to have. To be in Him. And to be full on. And those things can cool your love for Christ. Just as that tree branch just decayed.

And became powder. A falling away. A distraction. A lessening of that love for the Lord. And we all need to have that refreshing.

[25:06] Don't we? The Lord says to restore the first love. To return to the first love. And to ask God to refresh you again. In your spiritual life. I know that we all need that.

Many Christians say that they are committed. But they are not involved. I want to encourage you. Find a place. Find something you can do. Find a way to be involved.

They are like the Japanese kamikaze. Who went on 30 suicide missions. He was committed. But he was not involved. You know. He said. He was committed.

He was a Japanese kamikaze pilot. 30 missions. But he was not involved. And you know. We can say that we are committed to Christ. But it's about showing it.

Isn't it? It's about living it. And to not have the power of decay. But to have the power of God. Ask God to help. To refresh that power again. To tap into it. I know this morning it was referred to.

[26:01] Today is the. You know. The anniversary of the day of Pentecost. You think of the power of God. We need to harness that. Don't we? And unleash that. And be renewed in that.

To apply that. To tap into it. And think of how we can choose to serve God. To choose to serve him. It's all about choice.

Isn't it? We can choose many things in life. And sometimes we can choose that. Which is not. Not helpful. In the old time revival days in America.

There was a preacher called Sam Jones. And he used to have what are called Quitten meetings. Quitten meetings. And his preaching was directed primarily to Christians. And he was often urging them.

To give up sinful practices in their lives. And so Sam's messages are geared to him. Challenging Christians about sinful things. That they were still toying about with. And messing around with.

[26:57] That were damaging them. That were causing decay. That were causing them to be lax in their Christian life. Urging them to give up these sinful things. And Sam's messages were very effective.

And many people. They promised to quit swearing. To quit getting drunk. To quit smoking. To quit lying. To quit gossiping. Or quit anything else that was displeasing to the Lord.

And one day. Jones the preacher. He had a woman there. And she was talking to him. And he said to her. Just what is it that you are quitting? And she replied.

I'm guilty of not doing anything. And I'm going to quit doing that too. Even though she had no habits to give up. She wasn't actively living to please God.

She wanted to stop not doing anything. That's a good thing to do isn't it? You might think. I don't have anything really that drastically sinful in my life.

[27:53] I'm trying my level best to serve God. To live right. But maybe you're just not doing anything. Maybe it's time to think. How can I be more active for the Lord?

How can I let God use me? In more fashion. That he can be honoured through my life. As Joshua said. Choose you this day. And you will serve.

It comes to that decision point. Who?