

A Call to Serve

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[0 : 00] Let's turn our Bibles to the book of Joshua, chapter 24. This morning we'll be considering two verses, verses 14 and 15.

! The book of Joshua, chapter 24. Verses 14 and 15. As I was preparing, I was mindful that this sermon is longer this morning than the Mother's Day sermon.

And I reasoned that I allowed the church out early on Mother's Day because there was so much that was going to go on for mothers. But today, fathers, we will be bored if we leave early.

And so I figured we'd spend more time in God's Word this morning since we don't have as much time to allocate. Or we don't need to allocate as much time this afternoon. You don't find that humor, say. Take it.

Let's look to God's Word. Joshua 24, verses 14 and 15. Now therefore fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness.

[1 : 14] Put away the gods that your fathers 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. Father, we are so grateful that we are able to gather in this place today.

We are able to sing of the mercies of the Lord. We are able to be reminded of your amazing grace that you bestowed upon undeserving sinners because of the Savior's sacrifice on Calvary's cross.

Father, we ask this morning that on this Father's Day that you would speak to all of us from your Word, but Lord, in particular, that you would speak to fathers.

Lord, help us to renew ourselves afresh, recommit ourselves afresh to the task of being fathers, remembering that it is a stewardship from you for which we will one day stand before you and give an account.

[3 : 00] I pray, Lord, that you would use your Word to encourage us. I pray you'd use your Word to correct us and to help us to grow and change where we need to.

Father, we pray that you'd give us all ears to hear and hearts to obey this morning. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. These words that we just read were spoken by Joshua, and he spoke them to the nation of Israel towards the end of his life.

These two verses, Joshua's calling Israel to serve the Lord. And his words were addressed to the whole nation, but when you read them, you can see that he was, in particular, addressing fathers.

He was especially addressing fathers. And so as we consider these two verses this morning, here's the overarching point I want us to see. The call to serve the Lord applies to all people generally, but to fathers especially.

This call to serve the Lord applies to all people generally, but to fathers especially. And so this morning, while we are all being addressed by God's Word, fathers, we are especially being addressed this morning.

- [4 : 28] And so fathers, may we hear and heed God's Word this morning. The point of this passage that I just shared is the single point of my message this morning, but I want to cover it in two parts.
- First, a call to all to serve the Lord. And second, a call to fathers to serve the Lord. So we'll consider them in that order.
- First, a call to all to serve the Lord. In order for us to fully appreciate these words spoken by Joshua in these two verses, a bit of background is helpful.
- You would notice in verse 1 of Joshua 24 that it begins, 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. So this occasion is one of a national address. Here the second leader of Israel is very much aware that he is about to die.
- [5 : 44] And he is addressing the nation. In verse 14 of chapter 23, Joshua refers to his death by saying, I am about to go the way of all of the earth.
- Which means he was about to die because all who live on this earth are one day destined to leave this earth by way of death.
- And so the context in which this soon-to-die leader addresses the nation of Israel is this that we have just seen.
- He has summoned them all. They have gathered together. Now it's important to note that this was not just a pep rally that he was giving to them.
- This was not some motivational talk for them to serve the Lord. When we look at it very closely, what we see is that Joshua was not merely assembling them, but God was assembling them and God was the one who was addressing them.
- [6 : 47] Notice the last sentence in verse 1. And they presented themselves before God. Not before Joshua, but before God. They presented themselves.
- I notice further in verse 2 that Joshua addresses them on behalf of God. His words in verse 2 begin with the words, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel.
- Joshua is not just merely acting on his own behalf, he is acting on behalf of God. And then from verse 2 through verse 13, Joshua recounts and summarizes Israel's history and God's gracious dealings with the nation, beginning with Abraham, who was an idol worshiper, and ending with the children of Israel, and their settling into the promised land.
- And what we see is a gracious summary because it only highlights God's gracious dealings with Israel, and it does not mention their rebellion and their unbelief and their ingratitude in response to his gracious dealings.
- And here God is making an important point to Israel and to us. All Israel is gathered at Shechem, the place that God had promised the land to the descendants of Abraham.
- [8 : 11] And God reminds them of his grace to them. I think it's important for us to see this morning that because this call of God is based on his gracious dealings, this is the basis upon which God is going to call them to serve him.
- Many times we overlook this. We overlook the fact that the call of God to serve the Lord is based on what God has done.
- It's based on his gracious dealings. For example, many of us know the Ten Commandments. And we can recite most, if not all, the Ten Commandments. But many of us don't know the words that precede the Ten Commandments.
- We don't know what God said before he gave the Ten Commandments. We read in Exodus 20, verse 2, these are the words, I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

It is only after those words reminding Israel of God's deliverance, of God's mercy towards them, that he calls them to serve him. He gives them the Ten Commandments.

[9 : 26] So obedience to God was never intended to be in a vacuum. It was never intended to be wrote just because God said to do it. No. Obedience to God is in response to his glorious grace by which he saved us.

And so when we consider this passage, I want you to look at the language of the grace of God before the command to serve the Lord comes. Look at verse 3. God says, I took your father Abram from beyond the river and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many.

I gave him Isaac. And then in verse 5. 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.

Notice the language of redemption in those four words. I brought you out. In verses 6 and 7, God recounts how he graciously delivered Israel from the Egyptian army of the Red Sea.

And then in verse 9, he references Balak who summoned Balaam to curse Israel. And in verse 10, he says, But I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you.

[10 : 38] Again, so I delivered you out of his hand. And then he concludes, starting in verse 11, And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho and the leaders of Jericho fought against you.

And also the Amorites and the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand.

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 by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities you had not built.

and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant. And again, God's point to Israel was, I have been gracious to you.

[11 : 39] I have been faithful to you. But there's another reality. The other reality is that although God had been gracious to Israel and faithful to Israel in bringing them out of the land of bondage into the promised land, the people of Israel had not been faithful to God.

And this reality is a burden for Joshua as he faces death. And in verse 14, he transitions and he challenges the nation in light of God's faithfulness, in light of God's grace towards them.

He challenges their unfaithfulness. Joshua knew that God had been faithful to the nation of Israel and they were hypocritically holding on to all idol gods of their fathers and embracing the new idol gods of the Amorites.

And so, with the backdrop of this summary of God's faithfulness to Israel, Joshua says, Now therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and faithfulness.

Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord. In essence, he is saying to them, Now therefore, or in light of what God has graciously done, serve Him in sincerity and faithfulness.

[13 : 11] Now again, it should be clear that Joshua would not be calling Israel to sincerity and faithfulness in serving God if they were already sincere and faithful. The truth is, they were not.

They were insincere. They were unfaithful because they were worshiping other gods. Notice Joshua's charge in verse 14.

Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the mountain. And so knowing that his own death was at hand, Joshua challenges the entire nation to serve the Lord.

Now when I asked you a question, having considered the background, considered what Joshua calls them to do, in light of God's grace, in light of God's faithfulness to Israel, how is it that the people were not serving the Lord?

How is it that in spite of this true account of what God did for them, they were not serving the Lord?

[14 : 21] They were holding on to old idol gods, they were embracing new idol gods, and they were not being faithful to him. As I thought about this, I considered two reasons why they obviously were not faithful to the Lord, and the first is that Israel was ungrateful.

Israel discounted the gracious dealings of God with them, and they did not see that serving God was a logical response to what he did for them.

Paul says in Romans 12, 1, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, that you present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable, the word there comes from the Greek word where we get logical from, it's logikos, it means the logical thing that we are to do.

But Israel was not connecting that they were to be out of gratefulness serving the Lord in light of what he had done for them.

They felt entitled, they felt that they were God's people, they were Abram's heirs, and they were entitled to all that God had done for them, giving them cities that they did not build, and allowing them to eat from vineyards that they did not plant.

[15 : 48] The second obvious reason that came to mind that explains Israel's insincerity and unfaithfulness towards God is they didn't fear the Lord. They did not fear the Lord.

the people of Israel thought nothing of being unfaithful to God and serving other gods, even though God was holy and powerful, and that he does not condone or tolerate sin.

They saw God no differently from the idol gods of their fathers and the new idol gods of the Amorites, and so they embraced them all, and to them it was almost like the more the merrier.

That was the attitude. So they didn't fear the Lord. Brothers and sisters, what was true of Israel is true of us this morning.

If all of our histories were recounted, they would all be accented by God's merciful and gracious dealings with us.

[17 : 01] And this is true for all of us, even for those of us who may not be disciples of Jesus Christ. The witness of Scripture is that God is good to all. God is good to all that he has made.

Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that God causes the sun to shine on the just and the unjust. Makes the sun to, the rain to fall on the good and on the evil.

God is good to So in light of God's gracious dealings, what does how you live your life in relation to God say about your gratitude and your fear of the Lord?

Are you like the nation of Israel who, despite God's kindness to them, lived insincerely and unfaithfully by not serving the Lord? God is good to Perhaps you attend church, perhaps you pray, perhaps you even read your Bible, but the question is, are you living your life on your terms and by your rules without being devoted to God?

And if you are, you are called to serve the Lord in sincerity and in faithfulness. Now while it is true that obviously a lack of gratitude and a lack of fear of the Lord are reasons that Israel did not serve God, there is a deeper and more fundamental reason that Israel didn't serve the Lord.

[18 : 37] But I want to come to that a little later in this sermon. I want to move on. Let's look at verse 15. Joshua 24, verse 15.

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, whether the gods your fathers 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. Joshua makes very clear what the options were for Israel. They knew God's faithfulness.

angels. And they were now being called to draw a line in the sand. Joshua is in essence saying to them, decide one way or the other. If it is grievous to serve the Lord alone, then choose whom you are going to serve.

You can choose the old idol gods of your fathers, or you can serve these new ones. And see, even there, when you look at the language, the point is that we aren't able to serve multiple, we aren't able to have multiple allegiances.

[19 : 50] Joshua says to them, listen, if it is evil to serve the Lord, then choose who you're going to serve. Are you going to serve the old gods of your fathers, or are you going to serve the new gods of the Amorites?

But his point is very clear. You cannot serve the true God and these idol gods. So Joshua says to them, you need to choose who you're going to serve.

Some of you this morning stand where the nation of Israel stood. On that decisive day, Joshua challenged them and told them they needed to choose.

They needed to choose whom they were going to serve because they were trying to serve the true God and idol gods, and doing so is impossible. In a similar way, there are some of you who may have one foot in the church and one foot in the world, and you likewise are being called to choose.

You attend church, you sing perhaps, perhaps pray, perhaps even serve in some way in the church, but you have not surrendered your life to Jesus Christ.

[21 : 05] Christ. And the word to all who are not serving the Lord is the same. Choose this day whom you will serve. Whom will you serve?

And again, friends, let's not kid ourselves into thinking that we can love Christ and love the world.

That we can love Christ and fellowship with those who do not love Christ. The unchangeable realities that we can't. Here's what John says in 1 John 2, 11 through 15.

This is what John writes. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, listen, listen.

There are no exceptions to this. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that's in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride, pride and possessions is not from the Father, but is from the world.

[22 : 12] And the world is passing away along with his desires. But whoever does the will of God abides forever. This is the reason that Joshua says what he says in verse 15.

If you don't want to serve God alone, then choose your idol gods. God is not in the world. Maybe you're here this morning as a father.

And you know that you aren't serving the Lord, that you're like Israel, you're holding on to or attempting to hold on to God with one hand and the idol gods of your world, your life with the other hand.

But again, the truth is that you can't do that. We are called to serve God and God alone. And the reason is that God, because he is God, he shares worship with no one else and nothing else.

And what better day than today to choose to serve the Lord and be positioned to lead your children to do the same? So this brings me to my second and final point.

- [23 : 26] In these two verses, not only is there a call to serve the Lord, there's also a call to fathers to serve the Lord. Not only is there a call to all to serve the Lord, there's also a call to fathers to serve the Lord.

Now again, as Joshua addressed the nation of Israel, he began by recounting God's dealings with them and their fathers. But it was only, but was it only the fathers that God led out of Egypt?

Was it only the fathers that God delivered? Well, clearly not. God led Abraham and his family, he led Isaac and Jacob and their families, and he led the heads of households of Israel and their families.

So that day, as all Israel was assembled before God and before Joshua, fathers would have naturally been more attentive to Joshua than their wives and their children.

As a matter of fact, it would have been the responsibility of the fathers to ensure that their families came to the address by Joshua. It was their duty when there was a summon sent out that all the people were to gather.

- [24 : 41] Fathers had the responsibility for their wives and their children children to bring them to hear what God would say to them. And it was expected that fathers would primarily respond to Joshua's charge on behalf of their families.

Joshua's own choice makes this very clear. His own response makes this very clear. Joshua says to the nation, choose this day whom you will serve. If you don't want to serve God in sincerity and faithfulness, then choose your idol gods.

But, notice, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. What we see is that by his words and by his example, Joshua shows that he was committed to serving the Lord and he offered that to fathers primarily.

By his own example that he was primarily addressing fathers. Joshua chooses for himself and for his house.

Notice that Joshua didn't say, as for me and myself, or as for me and my wife. Joshua says, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

- [26 : 02] Now, Joshua was speaking for himself and his house, but exactly who was he speaking for in his house? When we think about what Joshua says, it is actually by some bit of deduction that we can conclude who Joshua was speaking for.

We see in verse 29 of chapter 24 that Joshua was about 110 when he died. He was 110 years old when he died. We don't know whether his wife was alive.

She may have been. She may not have been. We don't know if he had minor children. He may have. We see men in the Old Testament having children at very old ages, but we don't know if he had minor children in his house at the time.

If he did, he certainly would have been speaking for them. But I think the startling part of Joshua's statement is that he was speaking for his whole house.

He said, as for me and my house, meaning there are people in his house, and the most likely conclusion, while we may doubt that his wife was alive, while we might doubt that he had minor children, it is with almost absolute certainty that Joshua had adult children in his house.

- [27 : 21] Age of 110. And Joshua speaks for his house. And fathers, I think we can learn from this.

I think it is a given that we would ensure that we lead and direct and govern our children, minor children. But what about our adult children?

What about those children who are adults in their own right, but they are still under our roof? Joshua took primary responsibility for his house and his children, which obviously would have included his adult children.

Now exactly what does it mean that, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord? What does that look like in reality? The truth is, Joshua only knows his own heart.

Joshua could not have been with any degree of certainty saying that his whole household would serve the Lord from their hearts, because he doesn't know their hearts, nor can he control their hearts.

[28 : 46] I think what Joshua was saying was he was referring to an outward way of life that demonstrated fearing and serving the Lord. He was referring to some visual appearance.

Not so much that every single member of the house would be serving the Lord in true sincerity of heart. He was speaking about a life that was consistent with not worshipping idols and not having scandalous behavior that would betray what it means to serve the Lord.

And fathers, as it was on that day, when Joshua, led by instruction and example, by stating these words, so it is today.

Back then, his words and examples were especially to challenge other fathers to take responsibility for their families and to lead them in serving the Lord. And this morning, his words and his example should have the same effect on us as fathers as it had, was intended to have, and was intended to function for fathers who were before him that day.

And I want to say to us this morning, fathers, that like Joshua, we too are to make this bold declaration. In a nation that claims to be Christian, but lives so far from it, we are to make this bold declaration.

[30 : 16] As for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord. And notice again, this is a two-part commitment. The first is as for me. As for me.

That's where it starts, fathers. It starts with us. It starts with us in true commitment and true sincerity to commit to serving the Lord.

It's not enough to require that our family do so. It's not enough that we take our children, as it were, to Sunday school or to church.

We need to begin by personal example. And truth be told, this is one of the reasons why in our country, and perhaps in other countries as well, that so many households are not serving the Lord.

Because so many fathers are not serving the Lord. The attitude is more, do as I say, and not as I do. And so here's my question for all of us fathers who are gathered here this morning.

[31 : 21] Where do you stand in your heart before God? Where do you stand? Are you serving God in a world filled with idols competing for your heart?

And you're declaring, as for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord. And fellow fathers, I say this because it is only as we authentically serve the Lord that we can effectively lead our families in serving Him.

And if you're here today as a father, you do not know the Lord as Savior. I pray that you turn from sin. The Bible calls repentance. I give a trust in Jesus Christ, who alone can save.

And then the second part of the commitment is my house. Joshua took responsibility for his house. Fathers, let us take responsibility for our houses.

Don't just say, as for me, or as for me and my wife, but let us take responsibility for our houses. Let us take responsibility for our children, including our adult children.

[32 : 38] And together, let us serve the Lord. Now, I would be the first to admit that this is easier said than done. Joshua is a faithful man.

He obviously led his household well, and he could make the statement as he did. But the truth is, for many of us fathers, this is harder to do than it is to say.

And for many of us, even to begin something like this would require having a meeting with our households and sharing with them a renewed commitment and desire, with grace, with humility, doing it prayerfully.

A new desire that we will serve the Lord as a house. And then lay out what the reasonable expectations are, what that looks like for members of your household to serve the Lord.

Knowing we can't change hearts, knowing that we can't cause this to happen in the exact way that we can do in our own hearts.

[33 : 49] But it is a call to members of the family to conform to a particular level of conduct that is consistent with the commitment to serve the Lord. No scandalous behavior.

No commission of acts that are clearly in violation to what is plainly taught in the scriptures. And I just say this morning that whatever God calls us to do, God gives us grace to do.

So we will not do this alone. We will not do this aware that we're just by ourselves doing it. No, God will give grace to enable us to take responsibility for our houses.

As I considered this responsibility of fathers to lead their households in this way, I was mindful of single mothers.

Single mothers who do double duty and they also serve as fathers in many ways and many of them should be celebrated today as well. And single mothers, I say to you that you can likewise make the same commitment that Joshua made and say, as for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord.

[35 : 12] And what a joy it is to hear the testimonies of children who have grown up in single mother families. And they can testify of their mother's commitment and their mother's example in raising them in the way of the Lord.

I want to say to you that it is no different. God will provide the grace for you to be able to lead your families in serving the Lord by your personal example and by your instruction.

Now, earlier in the message, I asked the question about Israel's ingratitude and why is it that in light of all that God had done for them, they didn't serve the Lord.

They were unfaithful. They were ungrateful. Why is it? And I said it was a fundamental reason why they didn't do so beyond ingratitude and beyond not fearing the Lord.

When Joshua called the people to serve the Lord, three times they responded to him that they would. You find their response in verses 18, 21, and 24.

[36 : 29] They responded to Joshua, we will serve the Lord. But look at what Joshua says to them in verse 19. In verse 19, Joshua says to them, you are not able to serve the Lord.

For he is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. Now, again, let's not forget what's happening.

In verses 14 and 15, Joshua calls them to serve the Lord. And he tells them what he was going to do by his own personal example. And then when they say to him, we are going to serve the Lord, he says, you can't do it.

Is Joshua playing games with them? Is Joshua putting something on the top shelf that they absolutely can never reach? Friends, Joshua is actually not playing games with them.

He's being honest with them. He's being honest with them. He's saying to them, you are called to serve the Lord. But you can't serve the Lord. You can't do it.

[37 : 42] And this was not unique just to the nation of Israel. It is no different with us. Though we are called to serve the Lord, we cannot, in and of ourselves, serve the Lord.

And Joshua tells us why. Because God is a holy God. He is a jealous God. And he will not forgive or overlook our sins. And in these words, Joshua points to our dilemma.

He points to our dilemma. Our sinfulness makes us incapable of serving God. No matter how sincere we might be. No matter how well-meaning we may be.

No matter how hard we try. And these words of Joshua highlight for us why God sent Jesus Christ from heaven to earth. This is why Jesus had to come.

See, this is in our Bibles. This foreshadows why Jesus had to come. Jesus had to come because what God requires of us, we cannot do.

[38 : 56] Jesus came as the only perfect one. The only one who could serve and please God perfectly. Kept the law perfectly. And this morning, those of us who have put our trust in Jesus Christ, even when we fall short, we can stand and testify that though we have fallen short, Jesus succeeded and he was perfect.

And God credits his perfect life to our account, even though we in and of ourselves are not perfect. Even though we in and of ourselves fall short, God credits the perfect life of Jesus to all those who come to him, to all those who put their faith in him.

But Jesus not only lived the perfect life when he came to this earth. Jesus also died a substitutionary death to pay the penalty for the sins of sinners who put their faith and trust in God.

And now God is able to forgive sinners who come to him in faith through Jesus Christ. And so friends, let's not make the mistake of the people of Israel in thinking that in and of ourselves, we can serve the Lord.

The words of Joshua were true to them. The words of Joshua are true to us. You cannot, you are not able to serve the Lord for he is a holy God. But the good news this morning is because of Jesus Christ.

[40 : 29] By the grace of God, we and our children can truly serve the Lord. And it doesn't mean that our service to him will be perfect. It will not be perfect.

It will fall short. But at every point where we fall short, Jesus succeeded. And God in his mercy credits that to us.

Into our account. And so this life of service to God is possible through Jesus Christ. For all those who put their trust in him. For all those who turn from their sins.

For all those who confess him as Lord and personal Savior. And so we need God's help in order to serve him.

He calls us to serve him. In and of ourselves we can't. But he has made provision for us to be able to. Through Jesus Christ. And we won't do it perfectly.

[41 : 33] But because of Jesus Christ. Because of his perfect life. Because of his substitutionary death. God is able to receive us. And our service to him.

And so I pray this morning that we would all hear and heed this call to serve the Lord. But fathers especially. Let us join with Joshua.

And let us say as for me and my house. By the grace of God. We are going to serve the Lord. Let us pray together.