

Whom Will You Serve? (Joshua 24:1-28, Matthew 6:24 and Philippians 3:7-14)

23-Aug-26

Joshua 24:1-28

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.

² Joshua said to all the people, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. ³ But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, ⁴ and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his family went down to Egypt.

⁵ “‘Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. ⁶ When I brought your people out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. ⁷ 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 wilderness for a long time.

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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.

¹¹ “‘Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. ¹² 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. 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 eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.’

¹⁴ “Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and

serve the Lord. ¹⁵ But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

¹⁶ Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! ¹⁷ It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our parents 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 travelled. ¹⁸ And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God.”

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

²¹ But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the Lord.”

²² Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord.”

“Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.

²³ “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.”

²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the Lord our God and obey him.”

²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. ²⁶ And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord.

²⁷ “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.”

²⁸ Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance.

Matthew 6:24

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Philippians 3:7-14

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

There are **Bibles** in front of you

And a sermon **outline**

I encourage to have your **Bibles opened** up at **Joshua chapter 24**

Let's pray...

Intro/Covenant

We're almost at the end of the book of Joshua and Joshua is near the end of his life.

And he reflects on God's **covenant** with His people.

[Slide-Covenant]

A covenant is a formal, solemn, and binding agreement or promise between two or more parties.

[Slide-Covenant-Bible]

In the Bible **a covenant is a solemn, binding agreement or promise between God and humanity.**

The Hebrew word for covenant (***berith***) and it means literally “***cutting***” – and the reason for that is - in the Ancient world formal agreements were sealed by cutting animals in half and walking between them. The idea was that the parties involved in the agreement were saying if I break this covenant – I will be cut in pieces just like these animals [See Genesis 15]

In our culture you might hear people say – when they make a promise – cross my heart and hope to die!

Covenants were NOT meant to be broken!

God made a covenant with Abraham back in Genesis 15 about 2000BC. God promised Abraham - a large family of many descendants – the land of Canaan and that all nations would be blessed through Abraham’s family.

It’s now 600 years later and Joshua reflects on this covenant promise from God. And because Joshua can see that God has kept all these promises – He wants the Israelites to recommit to God – and he wants them to continue to serve the Lord God YHWH.

So in verse 1 Joshua assembles the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel – at a place called **Shechem** – so that they can renew this covenant with God.

Shechem is an important place.

- It’s the place where God originally made those promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:6-7)

- It's the place where Abraham's grandson Jacob built an altar (Genesis 33:18-20) and the place where Jacob ordered his household to get rid of the worship of false gods and idols (Genesis 35:2-4)
- And it's the place where Joshua and the Israelites had recommitted to God before - back in Joshua 8.

The first thing Joshua wants the people to do is

[Slide-Gifts]

Remember God's Gifts of Grace towards them – verses 1 to 13

Remember God's Gifts of Grace (Joshua 24:1-13)

1. God chose them — v.2

God called Abraham from beyond the River Euphrates – even though Abraham's family worshipped false gods! And God began a covenant relationship with Abraham. And Joshua is saying Israel only exists as God's people because of God's initiative and God's grace.

2. God gave them a family — vv.3–4

God multiplied Abraham's descendants and gave Isaac, Jacob and Esau. Israel's existence as a people was God's gift.

3. God rescued them from slavery in Egypt — vv.5–7

God sent Moses and Aaron, brought the 10 plagues upon Egypt, and brought Israel out of slavery – and parted the Red Sea. Their salvation was all God's work.

4. God protected them — vv.7–10

God guarded them through the wilderness, protected them from their enemies, and even took the curse the dubious prophet Balaam was hired to pronounce over them and turned it into a blessing.

5. God gave them victory — vv.11–12

God defeated the Amorites and other enemies. Israel did not win these battles simply through their own military strength; God fought for them.

6. And the best part - God gave them the Promised Land

As God says in v13: *“I gave you a land on 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.”*

They received what they had not earned. That’s grace!

Application

What about us?

What gifts of grace has God given us?

If we go back to say - when we were 20 years old – and reflect on how we have got to be here at Toukley now in 2026. I’m sure there have been lots of gifts of grace for each one of us!

For me – God saved me from drowning at age of 3. Sent Heather to tell me about Jesus when I was 33. God saved me from cancer twice! And lots more.

Perhaps at morning tea – you could share your gifts of grace from God with the people at your table?

(pause)

The point that Joshua is trying to make by giving the Israelites a history lesson is to say: “Israel – you haven’t earned or deserved God’s grace – it was a free gift – and these gifts of grace should motivate you to want to serve the Lord with all your heart”.

In the same way – we didn’t earn or deserve salvation from Jesus – it was a gift of grace [**in fact - the greatest gift of grace of all!**]- and this grace should motivate us to want to serve our Lord Jesus with all our heart!

Israel’s blessings and our blessings - should make us want to choose to serve the Lord!

Which is the second point – Joshua wants to make

[Slide-Choose]

Choose Whom You Will Serve – verses 14 and 15.

Choose Whom You Will Serve (Joshua 24:14-15)

V14 – Joshua calls upon the people to **fear the Lord** – this is not a fear like a phobia – but **reverent fear** - wanting to please God and not let Him down or disobey him.

And the people are to **serve God** with **faithfulness**.

And importantly to **throw away any of the gods their ancestors worshipped** beyond the Euphrates river and from Egypt.

They are to remove **ANY** false gods from their midst. Otherwise, they will be compromised - if they don’t!

Then in v15 – the KEY VERSE

Joshua presents a **choice to the people**: either a) **serve the gods the Israelites ancestors** served beyond the Euphrates River; or b) **serve the gods of the Amorites** in whose land (the Promised Land) they are living in now; or c) **serve the Lord, God YHWH**, as Joshua and his household will do!

Joshua commits to serving the Lord YHWH wholeheartedly.

We are to choose to serve our Lord Jesus in the same way. He is our master – we are His servants!

Application

Some questions for us to consider:

- Is Jesus really Lord of our household?
- What does that look like in our household?
- Is Jesus and His Kingdom's work a priority in our household?
- Do we reflect to our children and grandchildren that Jesus is the most important person in our lives?
- Would people know we were followers of Jesus by our actions and words?
- Are there things in our lives that prevent us putting Jesus first in our lives?

As Jesus says in our 1st NT reading from Matthew 6:24

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other”

Which brings us on to the third point – Joshua makes

Serve the Lord Alone – verses 16 to 24

[Slide-Serve the Lord Alone]

Serve the Lord Alone (Joshua 24:16-24)

The people take up Joshua's challenge to serve the Lord.

And in vv16-18 - they give some really good reasons for serving the Lord...

- God brought them and their parents out of Egypt and out of slavery
- God performed great signs [plagues; Red Sea; pillar of fire and cloud; manna; water from a rock]
- God protected them during their time in the wilderness and as they travelled through other nations' lands.
- God drove out the nations occupying the Promised Land, including the Amorites
- And God gave them the Promised Land

Therefore, like Joshua, they say they will serve the Lord!

Rather than just taking the people's word for it though; Joshua challenges them to think about what they are saying and what they are promising!

Joshua says – v19 - ***“you are not able to serve the Lord. He is a Holy God; He is a jealous God! And He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins!”***

Joshua is saying - if the people forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, God will turn away from them and bring disaster on them.

It's like Joshua is saying ***“Do you really understand what you are promising when you say, you will serve the Lord?”***

The people still promise – v21 - ***“No! We will serve the Lord!”***

And when Joshua reminds them – v22 - “*they are witnesses against themselves that they have chosen to serve the Lord!*”; and they agree they are indeed their own witnesses!

Having established, they are genuine, Joshua tells them – v23- to: “*throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.*”

The bottom line is the Israelites will not be able to follow and serve the Lord under their own strength; they will need to yield their hearts to the Lord and keep in a close faithful covenant relationship with Him – and let go of these foreign gods and idols?

Application

What do we have to let go of?

Here are some possible gods/idols we might have to let go of: money; wealth; possessions; career; comfort; family; friends; success; reputation; shopping, sport; entertainment; devices; technology; political party or causes; others’ approval; our own selfish desires; **even Church activity can be a problem – if**

being busy for the Lord replaces being with the Lord!

All of these things in of themselves are good things – but when they start controlling our lives and dictating to us where we invest our time and take us away from having the Lord as our priority in life and take us away from serving Him – and even replacing Him – then we are in serious bother!

Perhaps a helpful question to ask ourselves.

What would I really get upset about and find hard to live without – if I had to let it go – to serve the Lord?

You see there is a cost for serving the Lord.

Jesus Himself urges His potential followers to “count the cost” BEFORE following Him. Following and serving Jesus comes at a cost and is sacrificial. That’s what Joshua is saying to the Israelites – be sure you realize what serving the Lord means!

And that’s what the Apostle Paul is grappling with in our second NT reading from Philippians 3:7-14.

Paul counts his past achievements and worldly gains as a loss compared to the supreme value of knowing Jesus! In fact, he considers all he has and all he has achieved as “garbage” so that He can gain Jesus!

Paul, like Joshua, also makes a choice – He rejects his own imperfect righteousness in trying to keep God’s Law – and instead chooses Jesus’ righteousness because Jesus is the only one who can keep God’s Law perfectly! Also like Joshua, Paul commits to serving the Lord to the very end. Paul realizes that he has not reached the Heavenly Promised Land yet – so he must - just like the Israelites – submit to the Lord – serve the Lord – and press on towards the Heavenly prize of eternal life!

Both Joshua and Paul realize that the Lord requires exclusive allegiance to Him alone!

And that's what Jesus says in John 14:6 – “**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**”

Joshua finishes with his fourth point

[Slide-Remember commitment]

Remember Your Commitment To The Lord – vv25-28

Remember Your Commitment to the Lord (Joshua 24:25-28)

In vv25-26 – Joshua makes a covenant with the people there at Shechem – and reaffirms their commitment to God's decrees and laws – and he even records this commitment.

And to help them remember their commitment – he erects **a stone monument** under an oak tree in that holy place at Shechem

V27 – This stone is to be **witness** against the people if they are untrue or unfaithful to the Lord. It's like their commitment to the Lord is written in stone! In years to come – people can come to that stone and remember the commitment of God's people.

The stone tells a story – a bit like the tombstones in a graveyard – or the names on a cenotaph in a local town.

Memorials are important – lest we forget!

Application

As Christians we too – have some important memorials

We have:

- **Baptism** — Which reminds us we are saved by the blood of Jesus – and He has washed us clean of our sins and we belong to Him.
- **The Lord's Supper** — When we remember the New Covenant of Jesus' blood where His once and for all sacrifice on the cross – gives us forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Jesus even tells us to celebrate the Lord's Supper by telling us ***"do this in memory of me!"*** (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25)
- **The Cross** – A symbol of God's love and grace in sending Jesus to rescue us from sin and death!
- **The Empty Tomb** – which reminds us Jesus is alive and that He has defeated death – so we can have eternal life
- **Our lives** — Our lives are like that stone in Joshua chapter 24 – our lives are a witness – and as witnesses of Jesus – we are His ambassadors – calling people out of the darkness of sin and into His light!

How are we going as Jesus' witnesses?

What would you hope people would say about your witness for Jesus at the end of your life?

Perhaps you could ask someone at your table at morning tea – what would they say about your Christian witness?

Challenge – To Serve

[Slide-Challenge]

In Joshua 24, Joshua challenges us to join him and say **"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord"**

The Hebrew word for **serve** is [abad - עָבַד]

It means to labor or work for a master. **Our Master is Jesus!**

The Hebrew word to serve - also includes - **worship and obedience** – just like a servant would worship and obey their master!

In other words as servants of our master Jesus - everything we do is about working **for** Him and bringing glory to Him!

Even King Jesus said He came to serve not to be served – and He showed us how to do it!

So - If serving is not beneath our Master Jesus – then serving is certainly not beneath us either!

Therefore....

Let us Imitate Jesus

He prayed for others

He helped others

He showed compassion towards others

He served others

He taught others

He told people how to be saved for Heaven

He loved sacrificially – even unto death

[Slide-Question?]

If we are to imitate Jesus - write down **how you could serve your family and friends better?.....**

[Slide-Question?]

Is there some way you could serve the Lord at Church?

For example – after morning tea, we have a prayer meeting followed by a focus group on Aged Care and Pastoral Care – is that an area you can serve the Lord?

[Slide-Matthew 20:40]

As Jesus reminds us Matthew 20:40: *Whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do for me!*

When we love and serve others – we actually - love and serve Jesus!

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, thank you for the many gifts of grace you have showered upon us – especially the gift of grace of our Lord Jesus. Help us to join with Joshua and say “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”. Help us to love and serve our Lord Jesus with all of our life. In Jesus’ Name, we pray. Amen.

Benediction (Joshua 24:15)

“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Amen.