

Choosing Christ Defined by Commitment
Joshua 24:14-28

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June 18, 2017

Text Introduction: We have looked at the book of Joshua for the last two Sundays and look there again today. The book of Joshua picks up the story of the people of promise to the Promised Land. With new leadership, Joshua, we see God's continued presence. Joshua is one of the most inspiring books of the Bible. Though there are pockets of disobedience, like Joshua 7, the history of the people of God, under Joshua's leadership is a great example to us today of what it looks like to follow God.

This book opens with God encouraging Joshua. God called Joshua to awaken to the challenge before him. As God issued the challenge, He also assured Joshua of His presence and assured him that the plan is consistent with the past promises. God called on Joshua to be strong and courageous as he assumed this leadership.

Ultimately, God challenged Joshua to align himself with the Word of God.

The middle part of the book details tribe by tribe, portion by portion, the occupation of the land of Israel. A prophecy that has been promised since Genesis 12 and the call of Abraham (then named Abram) comes to fruition here in the Book of Joshua.

When we come to the end of the book, we are coming to final speeches of Joshua to Israel. The context is that these are words for the immediate as well as the future life of Israel in this land. Just as Deuteronomy records the last words of Moses, the book of Joshua records the last words of Joshua. The last three chapters of the book are a compilation of speeches or sermons from Joshua. The message of all three chapters is essentially the same. First, Joshua recounts God's faithfulness. Second, Joshua reminds Israel of the terms of the covenant—Israel must obey the commands of God. Third, Joshua warns of the punishment that will follow if they do not obey the commands of God.

Joshua 24:14-15 contains one of the great expressions of commitment in the Bible. Let's start there, but keep your Bibles open as we consider other parts of this last speech.

Text: ¹⁴ "Therefore, fear the LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship the Lord. ¹⁵ But if it doesn't please you to worship the Lord, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord."

Introduction: Joshua's farewell speech sounds like Moses' farewell speech. In Deuteronomy 30, we hear some of Moses' last words.

See, today I have set before you life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶ For I am commanding you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commands, statutes, and ordinances, so that you may live and multiply, and the LORD your God may bless you in the land you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you do not listen and you are led astray to bow

down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ I tell you today that you will certainly perish and will not live long in the land you are entering to possess across the Jordan. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰ love the LORD your God, obey Him, and remain faithful to Him. For He is your life, and He will prolong your life in the land the LORD swore to give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

Joshua, just as Moses before him had done, was calling the people of Israel to make a great commitment to God. Joshua had learned not only been told by God, but had experienced first-hand that their success in the future was directly tied to their relationship to Almighty God and their obedience in that relationship. Joshua knew that the relationship to God was not on their terms, but on God’s terms. As an Old Testament saint, Joshua would have recognized and affirmed the language of the New Testament and the specific language about commitment to Christ.

What characterizes the commitment Christ is worthy to receive? We see it in the final words of Joshua.

- **The Past Activity of God**

Our commitment to Christ is first of all characterized by the past activity of God. Look at how Joshua begins his speech in verse 1 all the way to verse 13.

Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem and summoned Israel’s elders, leaders, judges, and officers, 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 region beyond the Euphrates River, led him throughout the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants. I gave him Isaac, ⁴ and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave the hill country of Seir to Esau as a possession, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.

⁵ “Then I sent Moses and Aaron; I plagued Egypt by what I did there and afterward I brought you out. ⁶ When I brought your fathers out of Egypt and you reached the Red Sea, the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen as far as the sea. ⁷ Your fathers cried out to the LORD, so He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea over them, engulfing them. Your own eyes saw what I did to Egypt. After that, you lived in the wilderness a long time.

⁸ “Later, I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived beyond the Jordan. They fought against you, but I handed them over to you. You possessed their land, and I annihilated them before you. ⁹ Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, set out to fight against Israel. He sent for Balaam son of Beor to curse you, ¹⁰ but I would not listen to Balaam. Instead, he repeatedly blessed you, and I delivered you from his hand.

¹¹ “You then crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The people of Jericho—as well as the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites—fought against you, but I handed them over to you. ¹² I sent the hornet ahead of you, and it drove out the two Amorite kings before you. It was not by your sword or bow. ¹³ I gave you a land you did not labor

for, and cities you did not build, though you live in them; you are eating from vineyards and olive groves you did not plant.’

And, then, we fast forward to the New Testament. So much we could say. Let’s let just one verse stand. “He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Isaac Watts, the hymn writer for many hymns, included, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” made a daring move when he published his book of hymns in 1707. At this time, the Church of England only sang songs from the Book of Psalms. Watts wanted to be able to lead the church to sing the Gospel in public worship, and thank God he persevered amidst the criticism. Because he did, we get this grand hymn and a reminder of our commitment because of the past activity of God through Jesus Christ.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Here is the reason for commitment. In light of what Christ has done for us, how could our commitment not be anything else, but all?

- **The Possible Alternatives other than God**

The second basis for Joshua’s plea for commitment is comparison. Notice how he does this in verses 14-15.

¹⁴ “Therefore, fear the LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship the Lord. ¹⁵ But if it doesn’t please you to worship the Lord, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord.”

Then, notice the people's agreement in verses 16-18.

¹⁶The people replied, "We will certainly not abandon the LORD to worship other gods! ¹⁷For the LORD our God brought us and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery, and performed these great signs before our eyes. He also protected us all along the way we went and among all the peoples whose lands we traveled through. ¹⁸The LORD drove out before us all the peoples, including the Amorites who lived in the land. We too will worship the LORD, because He is our God."

- **Our Particular Actions in response to God**

This text makes it clear that our actions in choosing to follow after God must be clear as in decisive and complete. Remember one of the ongoing stories of the Bible is that partial obedience is disobedience. Surrender that is not complete is not surrender.

¹⁹But Joshua told the people, "You will not be able to worship the Lord, because He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not remove your transgressions and sins. ²⁰If you abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods, He will turn against you, harm you, and completely destroy you, after He has been good to you."

²¹"No!" the people answered Joshua. "We will worship the LORD."

²²Joshua then told the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you yourselves have chosen to worship the Lord."

"We are witnesses," they said.

²³"Then get rid of the foreign gods that are among you and offer your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

²⁴So the people said to Joshua, "We will worship the LORD our God and obey Him."

Unless your actions are decisive, unless you remove idols from your lives and offer your heart first to God, you will never completely be committed to Him.

- **Personal Accountability in keeping our commitment**

Again, what captivates me most in this passage is Joshua's personal commitment. As for me and my house (my family), we will worship the Lord. It is as though Joshua is saying as the hymn writer of "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" said, "Though none go with me, I still will follow, no turning back, no turning back."

This week has been a reminder to me and probably to you as well that I am not in control. I am not in control of what the world thinks of Jesus. I am not in control of our nation. I can't speak for anybody else, but I can speak for me.

- **Public Acknowledgement to solidify our commitment**

²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people at Shechem and established a statute and ordinance for them. ²⁶ Joshua recorded these things in the book of the law of God; he also took a large stone and set it up there under the oak next to the sanctuary of the LORD. ²⁷ And Joshua said to all the people, “You see this stone—it will be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words the LORD said to us, and it will be a witness against you, so that you will not deny your God.” ²⁸ Then Joshua sent the people away, each to his own inheritance.

A rather fascinating part of this story is when Joshua tells them that they will not be able to worship the Lord. Can you imagine someone in a moment responding to the invitation to follow Jesus and saying to them, “Go, sit back down.” Joshua wanted them to very much understand the seriousness of the commitment. One of the ways to do that both then and now is to publicly acknowledge. Joshua led them to do that.

Dads, you might think I forgot about you this morning. No, you are at the heart of this text. “As for me and my family...” Before Joshua spoke as the leader of the nation, he spoke as the leader of his family.

What about it Dads? Be the leader. Step up. Get off the fence. Dive in the deep end.

What is your response?

One last thing. Judges 2:6-13.

Joshua sent the people away, and the Israelites went to take possession of the land, each to his own inheritance. ⁷ The people worshiped the LORD throughout Joshua’s lifetime and during the lifetimes of the elders who outlived Joshua. They had seen all the LORD’s great works He had done for Israel.

⁸ Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110. ⁹ They buried him in the territory of his inheritance, in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰ That whole generation was also gathered to their ancestors. After them another generation rose up who did not know the LORD or the works He had done for Israel.

¹¹ The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD’s sight. They worshiped the Baals ¹² and abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. They infuriated the LORD, ¹³ for they abandoned Him and worshiped Baal and the Ashtoreths.

As you make this commitment today, know that commitment is not in words, but in actions.