



28 Joshua 24 – As For Me and My House, We Will Serve the Lord!

How do we end such an incredible book of the Bible? We have watched these imperfect people of God as they've made their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. It has reminded each of us of our own walk with Christ. We have learned together that whenever God takes you FROM somewhere He takes you TO somewhere. He calls you out to take you in! He desires to take us each out of our sin, and into "Promised Land Living;" which means

living a victorious Christian life.

We started this study examining God's covenant promises to Abraham. He promised Abraham, *"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"* (Genesis 12:2-3, NIV).

This promise included a promise of a physical land. We have studied together the events that unfolded as Israel ended up taking the land which God had promised to them. It is absolutely incredible to me that in our lifetime we have seen God continue to unfold this promise to His people. God is indeed working His purposes out. Israel was given a physical promise, but we were not. Instead, God gives each of us who are believers an inheritance that is spiritual. The deposit on that inheritance was the Holy Spirit and other parts of the inheritance include living the life that is available to us when we walk in faith

The first generation that left Egypt took 40 years and they never made it to the Promised Land. Under the leadership of Joshua and Caleb, another generation of Israel crossed over into the land. They then took seven years to conquer the land and an additional 13 years to settle in the land in its entirety. With Israel finally settled in the land, this morning we will hear Joshua's final advice for the people before he dies. In a similar way, Christian growth is about learning the promises of God, believing them, and then walking in them. It is about occupying the victorious Christian life that God promises to each of us. We walk in the land by walking "by faith in the Spirit." I was reminded recently that it's good for us to remember that walking is not running. Walking is not sprinting. Walking is a day by day, step by step journey of faith that you and I make in the appointed time that God puts us on earth. Turn with me please to Joshua chapter 24.

24 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. (Joshua 24:1-4, NIV).

Joshua recounts that Abraham had come from Ur of the Chaldees. It was the New York City of the ancient world. We learn from early extra-biblical Jewish writings that Terah, Abram's father, was a dealer of statues of gods, and Abram was his father's assistant in the business. Those ancient gods were always gods of self and pleasure. They were nothing of power, being made simply of wood, stone, and metal. And then out of nothing but pure grace, God called out to Abram and Abram answered the call. He left Ur not knowing where he was going or how he was going to get there. All that he knew is that God would be there when he got there. Let's read on.

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. (Joshua 24:5-7, NIV).

Joshua reminds the people of their spectacular deliverance at the Red Sea. I did a series about a year ago that we called the Red Sea rules. Joshua reminded them that it was God who had delivered them. Joshua also mentions that they lived in the "wilderness" along time. Deuteronomy chapter one tells us that the journey from Egypt to Kadesh-Barnea was an eleven day journey, and yet the Children of Israel ended up spending 40 years in the desert. They were plagued by fear and unbelief. We too can "live in the wilderness" a long time when we are beset with the same sins of unbelief and fear that plagued Israel in Kadesh-Barnea. Often we're paralyzed in our fear or we're ignorant in our unbelief of what God has promised us. Christians who are stuck in "Kadesh-Barnea" are what I've referred to in this study as "wilderness Christians." They watch the promised land from afar never enjoying the abundant life that is available to them. Joshua continues.

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." (Joshua 24:8-13, NIV).

God reminds the Children of Israel that it wasn't by Israel's strength or might that the land had been conquered. God says he "sent the hornet" before them. I'm not exactly sure what that means, but I do know that God drove the enemy out by whatever means were necessary. We studied about a hailstorm that God sent and even the lengthening of time itself to overcome the enemies in the land. Time and again in Joshua we have seen God doing the impossible part, but we also saw the principle that He left work to be done in faith by those taking the land. Joshua then gives his audience the great choice that is available to each and every one of us. At the top of page one I have a photo that was taken today as I prepared this lesson. It is a photo of a plaque on the right side of my front door. Let's see why I have it there.

Moment of Decision

*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.**" (Joshua 24:14-15, NIV).*

After Joshua had reminded Israel of the mighty work of God in their lives, he added that they each had a personal choice to make. I remember being a teenager and coming to a point where I wanted God to show me if He was real. I was spiritually empty and hungry. If God were real, I wanted a relationship with Him. If He didn't exist, then I'd move on with life and other things. I knew that I had one life to live and I wanted to do it right. I didn't want to waste my time on things that didn't matter. As I sought Him, He showed me that He was real by convicting me of my sin and shortcomings. I began to see myself as I really was. I cried out to the Lord and I remember realizing that it was time for a real and life-changing choice. I made that choice to serve the Lord.

If you visit my house today, you will see a plaque that has that statement on my door posts (see it above). All who visit my home know that as for the McMullen house, we serve the Lord.

We don't serve any Lord. We serve the One true God, the Maker of heaven and earth. We serve the risen Jesus in Whom we put our trust. We serve the Holy Spirit that is deposited into our hearts, teaching us how to live. So, I'm asking everyone in this congregation this morning and everyone reading these words, "Whom will you serve?" I would add my paraphrase of Joshua's words when I say, "if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourself this day whom you will serve; whether it be the gods of the world, the gods of self and pleasure, or the One true God. **But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.**" I guess it was an emotional speech because we immediately see the response of the people.

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 traveled. 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." (Joshua 24:16-18, NIV).

When I read this I always wonder just how sincere these people were. There are many people that get up and say, "I want to rededicate my life and get back into church," but very quickly the emotion of the moment fades, and any commitment that they made is laid aside and forgotten. Let's ask the Lord to help us keep our commitments.

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. (Joshua 24:19-22, NIV).

This is kind of an odd thing Joshua is saying when he tells them they are not able to serve the Lord. I guess what I get out of it is that apart from Him, you and I are unable to serve Him. We CAN however serve God by His power. This comes from surrender, not by becoming "busier doing God's business." I think serving God happens when we just say, "God, come what may I will serve You. Lead me and guide me in that service. Lord let me not be just 'busy' for you but let me be busy in obeying you." Paul actually tells us that when it's right, it is God working in and through us.

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear

and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Philippians 2:12-13, NIV). [Fear and trembling is when we get down on our knees and admit our inadequacy and look to Him to work in and through us.]

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." (Joshua 24:23-24, NIV).

Joshua told them to forsake those hidden foreign gods and to turn to Yahweh alone. We talked on Wednesday about how the "foreign gods" today can be the values and ideals of the world. They get into our souls and take root and ask for our allegiance. Sometimes an indication of what place our allegiance in is seen in those things upon which we spend our time, talent, and treasures.

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. ²⁹ After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. ³⁰ And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. ³¹ Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel. ³² And Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants. ³³ And Eleazar son of Aaron died and was buried at Gibeah, which had been allotted to his son Phinehas in the hill country of Ephraim. (Joshua 24:25-33, NIV).

I want to end this study of Joshua reminding each of you that we are each presented with a choice. Whom will you serve? As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Would you join me? It takes a simple prayer that can sound something like this. "Lord, I don't know how to do this thing on my own. Lord, you've taken me from my sin and lost condition and you desire for me to enter the promised land of an abundant life. Lord, I accept that Jesus died on a cross in place of me. Lord, I praise you that He rose from the dead and that the Holy Spirit has been deposited into my soul and spirit. Guide and direct me Lord. This day I choose once again to serve you. Show me Lord how to do that. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen".

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