

Choose Ye This Day Whom Ye Will Serve

Introduction:

- I. The book of Joshua describes the conquest of the land of Canaan. Joshua, the successor of Moses, leads the way in this endeavor. Their objective was not only to take the land and make it their own, but also to drive out the Canaanites. The importance of driving the Canaanites out of the land rested in the fact the Canaanites served false gods that could potentially have a negative influence upon the Israelites. Now, while the Israelites were successful in taking the land that God had promised to Abraham and his descendants, they failed to totally subdue the Canaanites. Traces of their false religion remained to tempt the Israelites and as a result we find that over and over again the Hebrew people departed from the one true God to serve idols. This propensity toward false worship was the main reason for Joshua's moving speech in the 24th chapter of Joshua (**Josh. 24:14, 15**).
- II. The Israelites desperately needed to hear these words of Joshua. But the fact is the words spoken by Joshua are needed by all of us. We must all make a choice in regard to God. We must all choose whether we will serve God or not. There are several points of interest in this statement of Joshua, but this morning I want to look at four things that are indicated by Joshua.

Lesson:

I. Joshua Indicated That We Can and Must Make a Choice.

Joshua was not a Calvinist. He did not believe in the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. Yes, predestination is a Bible doctrine, but it doesn't have the Calvinistic twist to it that indicates that man has no choice in determining whether he is saved or not. Calvinism teaches that God made the decision of who was going to heaven and who was going to hell before the foundation of the world. But Joshua certainly did not advocate such an hypothesis. Joshua is what Baptists would call a "free-willer," and he called on the Israelites to exercise their free will. And the fact of the matter is we all have a free will. In Genesis the first chapter and at verse twenty-six (**1:26**), God said, "...*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*" Now, a part of being created in the image of our God is that we were made rational and intelligent beings. We were created with minds with which to think and reason. And God expects, in fact, God demands that we use our minds to understand His will and therefore obey His laws. And so, each one of us have been created as free moral agents with the ability to choose which course of life to follow. We all, therefore, must choose which avenue to pursue as we travel the road of life. And what it all means is that we have some very serious and weighty decisions to make as we go through

life. Life is really about making choices. And please be advised that the choices which we make reveal what kind of character we have, and will ultimately determine whether or not we please God.

The words of Eleanor Roosevelt ring true: *“One’s philosophy is not best expressed in words. It is expressed in the choices one makes. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves (by our choices). The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility.”*

- Will you choose love or hatred?
- Will you choose joy or the sadness and sorrow of the world?
- Will you choose peace or a spirit of anger?
- Will you choose to have patience or an attitude of exasperation?
- Will you choose to be kind or will you choose to be cruel?
- Will you choose honesty or dishonesty?
- Will you choose faithfulness or unfaithfulness?
- Will you choose to trust God or will you choose to have a lack of faith?
- What kind of parent will you choose to be?
- What kind of friend will you choose to be?
- What kind of brother or sister in Christ will you choose to be?
- What kind of example to the world will you choose to be?
- What kind of employee or employer will you choose to be?
- What kind of neighbor will you choose to be?
- What kind of Bible student will you choose to be?
- WHAT KIND OF CHRISTIAN WILL YOU CHOOSE TO BE?

You must make choices as you travel through life. But all of these kinds of choices are made easy when you choose one thing first -- to serve God. That was the choice of Joshua: *“...choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*

Regardless of what the rest of the Israelites would do, he would serve the Lord with all his house. That’s the choice that is before us. Will we serve God or will we serve self? Will we serve God or will we serve man? Will we serve God or will we serve mammon. We have a choice, don’t we?. You have a choice and I have a choice. The question is what will that choice be? And really the choice is not that hard. Just stop and think about it. If you serve self, what will you gain? Perhaps some pleasure of the transitory sort. But if you serve God, the end will be eternal joy. If you serve man, what will you gain? Maybe a little popularity and other earthly rewards that will soon vanish with time, but if you serve God, you’ll receive a crown of life that fadeth not away. If you serve mammon, what will you gain? Perchance you might acquire prestige and power and a place of high rank among men, but if you serve God, you’ll sit in high or heavenly places in

Christ right now, and live in endless glory after while. What will your decision be? What choice will you make? We should all say with Joshua before us, ***“we will serve the Lord.”***

II. We Must Make an Exclusive Choice.

Read the words of Joshua again (**vers. 14, 15**). Joshua did not suggest that they could serve God and gods! Joshua gave the people an “either or situation.” He didn’t say serve both God and gods; he said it is either God or gods. They must decide there and then whom they would serve; either the gods that their fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the one true and living God, but they could not serve both. Joshua called on the people to make an exclusive choice. And Joshua was not the only one to suggest that such a choice was necessary. Elijah reinforced this position on Mt. Carmel.

The kingdom of Israel had become totally corrupt by the unchallenged practice of idolatry. Never was this more evident than when Ahab, the seventh king of Israel, took the throne. His fate was sealed when he married Jezebel, a loyal follower of the false god Baal. Before you knew it, the worship of that false god was thoroughly established throughout Israel. Ahab had a temple and an altar built in Samaria where Baal could be served. There were 450 prophets of Baal in Israel, as well as 400 prophets of the groves who ate at Jezebel’s table. Ahab was truly the king of Idolatry and he did more to provoke the Lord than all of the kings before him. He lead Israel into the darkest time of her history.

But during this dark period of unfaithfulness toward the Lord, there appeared on the scene a man who would become one of the greatest of all of the prophets of Israel. His name was Elijah. His name meant ***“The Lord Is My God,”*** and the life that he lived and the boldness of his character, demonstrated that he was worthy of such a name. Upon his arrival, he immediately confronted the wicked King Ahab and pronounced that the rain would cease according to his word. And cease it did for three and half years causing a terrible drought in the land of Israel. Then in the third year of the drought, God appeared to Elijah and told him to go before Ahab and He would cause it to rain. So Elijah made the arrangements and appeared before Ahab, a man he knew wanted to take his life. What followed was a great contest between God and the false god Baal (**1 Ki. 18:22-40 - describe the scene**).

But I like what Elijah told the people before the contest even started. He said to them:

“How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him...” (ver. 21).

These people had a choice to make. It was an exclusive choice. Like Joshua before him, Elijah didn't tell the people to serve God and Baal; he did not give them the option of serving two gods at once. He told them to make up their minds. Make an exclusive choice. And that, men and women, is exactly what we must all do.

This idea of serving God exclusively is not simply an Old Testament precept. Jesus advocated the same thing as He preached to those who would be citizens of the kingdom of God (**Matt. 6:24**).

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

The world into which Jesus was manifested had to be very disturbing to Him to say the least. It was a world in which man sought to serve as many gods as possible. There was always room in the Greek pantheon for another god. But Jesus, Who was indeed, God manifested in the flesh, knew very well that the only road to heaven was through the only true God. And so Jesus, like Joshua and Elijah, called for an "either-or" decision. Choose God or choose mammon; but you simply cannot choose both. And I want you to notice the extent of our Lord's words. Jesus didn't say it would be very difficult to serve two gods. Jesus didn't say that it was something so hard to do that only few could accomplish such a feat. Jesus said, "NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS..." Now was talking about serving two masters that are diametrically opposed to each other and He gives the example of God and mammon.

"Mammon is from an Aramaic word for wealth." Few things have done more damage to our society and caused more distance between God and man than an immoderate desire for wealth. Paul said,

"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10).

Now it must be pointed out that it is not money that is the root of all evil, but rather the love of it that causes so much evil in our world. You notice that Paul uses the words *coveted after* in this passage. Covetousness has to do with having an excessive desire for something. When a person allows his love of money to dethrone God in his life, he is guilty of covetousness, and make no mistake about it, nothing good ever comes from covetousness. In fact Paul referred to covetousness as idolatry in **Col. 3:5**.

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

Listen to Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary on covetousness:

“In the New Testament period the term idolatry began to be used as an intellectual concept. Idolatry became not the actual bowing down before a statue, but the replacement of God in the mind of the worshiper...While we may not make or bow down to a statue, we must be constantly on guard that we let nothing come between us and God. As soon as anything dies, that thing is an idol. In addition to material objects such as houses, land, and cars, idols can be people, fame, reputation, hobbies, pride, etc.”

Now the point of this lesson is that we must choose God and it must be an exclusive choice. We must not put anything or anybody before God. We must choose to serve God. If you can’t serve God than turn to mammon, but don’t try to do both. Don’t be wishy-washy. Don’t halt between two opinions. Choose just who it is that you’re going to serve.

III. Joshua Indicated the Urgency of the Choice.

Some decisions can be put off. Some decisions can be made over a period of time. But then there are some decisions and choices that are so important that they need to be made now. And when it comes to serving God, that is one of those choices that needs to be made, and the sooner the better. Joshua said, *“...choose you this day whom ye will serve...”* It wasn’t choose tomorrow. It wasn’t take your time and choose. It was “choose you this day.” This is exactly in line with what Paul taught (**2 Cor. 6:2**).

When it came to obeying the gospel, people of the first century made an immediate choice when their hearts were pricked (**Acts 2:36-41; Acts 8:5, 12; Acts 16:30-33**).

We should all make an immediate choice to serve God. Whether it is obeying the gospel today, or just being a better servant to our Lord Jesus Christ, we should choose today to do it. There is no need to waste time, for once time is gone, it is gone forever.

IV. Joshua Indicated That the Choices We Make Are Personally.

There is one more thing that we will leave with you, and that is that the choice is personal. “Choose YOU this day.” Nobody can choose to serve God. It is a personal choice and in the end, you will be held personally accountable for the choices that you have made. Paul once said, *“So then*

every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12). You must make a choice today!

Conclusion:

Well, one more time, Joshua said, *“Choose you this day whom you will serve.”* We learn that we can make a choose, that it should be an exclusive choice, that we should make it today, and that the choice to serve God is personally. What will you choose to do today? I hope that you choose to serve God before it is too late.