

12. Serving the Lord in sincerity

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We might laugh at or look down on the Israelites who continuously served other pagan gods instead of their mighty and faithful God. But if we or any other born-again Christians were there at that time instead of them, I don't think that we would have been a lot different than they were.

Today many people claim to be the followers of God, yet when they have to make choices, a great number of them turn their hearts from God to the things they would like to do. If you have any doubt for that, think about church attendance and tithing. I rest my case.

Even many church leaders serve the Lord outwardly. But in reality, they are doing it for the money or the prestige. They are not true shepherds. They are wolves in sheep's clothing, desiring to fleece the flock rather than to feed the flock. These people hurt the cause of Christ because they don't serve Him in sincerity and truth.

Now Joshua is facing the end of his life and makes two final addresses to the leaders and people of Israel. He pleads and urges them to follow the God of Israel with all of their hearts, minds and soul.

A. I AM OLD, ADVANCED IN AGE

Joshua 23:1-2 Now it came to pass, a long time after the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age. 2 And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them: "I am old, advanced in age.

Joshua's long life started in Egyptian bondage and ended in a worship service in the Promised Land. In between those events God had used him to lead Israel in defeating the enemy, conquering the land and claiming the promised inheritance. With the Apostle Paul, Joshua could sincerely say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

His greatest concern was his people and their relationship to the Lord. He didn't want to leave until he had challenged them once again to love the Lord and keep His commandments.

To counteract this danger, Joshua gave the people three strong motives for remaining a separated people and serving the Lord faithfully.

B. REMEMBER WHAT THE LORD HAD DONE FOR YOU

Joshua 23:3-4 You have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the Lord your God is He who has fought for you. 4 See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward.

By reminding them what the Lord had done for them, Joshua was hoping that they would follow the Lord wholeheartedly. The same God who overcame the enemy in the past could help Israel overcome them in the future. God had never failed His people. If they would trust Him and obey His Word, He would help them completely conquer the land.

Just like these Israelites quickly forgot God's faithfulness, we, too, often forget His faithfulness and His track records in our lives. That is the precise reason why we WORRY.

As we read the Bible and see what God did in the past for those who trusted Him, it encourages us to trust Him today and face all our enemies with courage and confidence.

C. REMEMBER WHAT THE LORD SAID TO YOU

Joshua 23:5-10 And the Lord your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the Lord your God promised you. 6 Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, 7 and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them, 8 but you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day. 9 For the Lord has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day. 10 One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.

The secret of Joshua's success and the reason for Israel's victories were Joshua's devotion to the Word of God. He obeyed God's commandments and believed God's promises, and God worked on his behalf. But even more, his devotion to the Word of God enabled Joshua to get to know God better, to love Him, and to want to please Him. It isn't enough to know the Word of God. We must also know the God of the Word and grow in our fellowship with Him.

We must not turn aside from the Word to the right hand or to the left, because satan doesn't care which extreme he gets us off to. Either legalism or licentiousness please him.

All of us feel the pressures of the world around us, trying to force us to conform. It takes courage to defy the crowd and stay true to the Lord. But it also takes love for the Lord and a desire to please Him. The word translated "hold fast" in v8 is used in Genesis 2:24 to describe a husband's relationship to his wife. Israel was "married" to Jehovah and was expected to be a faithful spouse and cleave to the Lord. How tragic that she became an unfaithful wife, a prostitute, as she turned to the gods of other nations!

D. REMEMBER WHAT THE LORD WOULD DO TO YOU

Joshua 23:11-16 Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the Lord your God. 12 Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations--these that remain among you--and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you, 13 know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the Lord your God has given you. 14 "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed. 15 Therefore it shall come to

pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the Lord your God promised you, so the Lord will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the Lord your God has given you. 16 When you have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you."

The Word of God is like a two-edged sword: If we obey it, God will bless and help us, but if we disobey it, God will chasten us until we submit to Him.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Some of God's promises are unconditional, but some of them are conditional and depend on our obedience for their fulfillment. As long as we do what the Lord wants us to do, He will fulfill His promises. It is up to us. He is not playing a game with us. He is all ready to fulfill His end of deal, but we are the ones who cause problems.

E. THE COVENANT AT SHECHEM

It has been said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." A knowledge of their roots is very important to the Jews because they are God's chosen people with a destiny to fulfill in this world. So Joshua took time to go over a brief history of Israel back from Abraham to the current in the first portion of chapter 24.

I am sure that you all have noticed that the Lord reminded the Israelites that it was Him who made all this conquest successful, not them. They get to live in the cities they didn't build, eat the fruits off the vineyards they didn't plant, drink water out of the cisterns they didn't dig. The same is true of our blessings. We don't earn them. They are gifts from God.

F. A DECISION TO SERVE THE LORD

Joshua 24:15-18 And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of 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." 16 So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; 17 for the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. 18 And the Lord drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God."

Joshua commands them to choose whom you will serve, not if you will serve. We will all serve someone – either the devil, intentionally or not, or the LORD. We really are not left the option of not serving anyone.

Joshua also understood that he, as the priest of his family, was charged with the responsibility to see that his whole house served the LORD. He had the job of representing his whole house before God.

Everybody must worship something or someone, whether they realized it or not, because humanity is "incurably religious." If we don't worship the true God, we would end up worshipping the false gods of this wicked world. We can't do both.

Joshua was one of the two who is still alive from the two million people who left Egypt. He personally witnessed how wicked people are. At Mt. Sinai, they promised that they obey the Lord only, no one else. But a few weeks later, they were worshipping a golden calf.

Jehovah is a jealous God and a holy God, and He could never permit them to be divided in their loyalty. Just as a husband and wife are faithful to their marriage vows and jealously guard their mate's affection, so Israel had to be faithful to the Lord. But they were not.

Choosing our God and following Him exclusively require denouncing of our desires and ourselves. It is no wonder why the Lord Jesus taught us that if we want to follow Him, we must deny ourselves daily. Not just one time in our lives, but daily. It is because our carnal desires don't die that easily. They are like weeds. You think that you pluck them out all or killed them all with the chemical you used on them. After a nice afternoon rain, in a week or so, there are weeds in your yard again.

G. A TRUE LEADER WHO CARES ABOUT THE FOLLOWERS' FUTURE

Joshua 24:19-33 But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. 20 If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good." 21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the Lord!" 22 So Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord for yourselves, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses!" 23 "Now therefore," he said, "put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel." 24 And the people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!" 25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. 26 Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. 27 And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God." 28 So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance.

29 Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being one hundred and ten years old. 30 And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. 31 Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. 32 The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph. 33 And Eleazar the son of Aaron died. They buried him in a hill belonging to Phinehas his son, which was given to him in the mountains of Ephraim.

Joshua's two farewell speeches give ample evidence that he was a true leader, burdened for the future of his country. He wanted to be sure that the people knew the Lord and wanted to serve Him with their whole heart. People who think only of what they can get today are only opportunists and not true leaders. Leadership means planting the right seeds that will bear fruit in years to come for the benefit of others, and Joshua did that.

Unlike Joshua, when King Hezekiah was told that the kingdom of Judah would eventually go into captivity in Babylon, his response was, "At least there will be peace and truth in my days" according to Isa. 39:8. I think it is rather selfish of him. Isn't a king supposed to be concerned about the generations to come, too?

The greatest need in the church today is for God's people to see how much they are missing by wandering in unbelief, or by living on the borderline of the blessing, and then to claim God's promises and enter into their spiritual inheritance.

We're a deprived people because we've failed to claim our spiritual riches. We're a defeated people because we've failed to trust our Lord to lead us on to victory. Too many of us are like Achan, stealing from God, when we ought to be like Caleb, claiming the mountains and overcoming the giants.

H. APPLICATIONS

The Book of Joshua points everything to God rather than the mighty brave man Joshua. It is right for us to remind ourselves of a few attributes of our God.

- 1) **He is the God of the covenant with His people.**
- 2) **He is a holy God who will not tolerate sin.**
- 3) **He is a God who requires obedience on the part of His people.**
- 4) **He is the God who never fails.**
- 5) **He is the God of wonders.**