

Joshua's Farewell Address, Part 2

Joshua 24:14-24

Joshua 24:14-24 - *"Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!"¹⁵ 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."*

¹⁹ 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 or 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!"

Background Notes

Joshua 24 is the record of Joshua's farewell address to all Israel, who were gathered together before the Lord at Shechem. Shechem is located in the central part of the land. Verse 1: *"Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God."* The purpose of this farewell address was not only to say goodbye to the people as Joshua retired from public life, but it was also to have the people renew their covenant with the Lord.

A number of commentaries on the book of Joshua point out that Joshua 24 is given in the typical form of an ancient treaty between a king and his vassals. In this case, it was a covenant treaty between the Lord as King and the people of Israel as His servants. The structure of the ancient treaty would be as follows. Verses 1-2: the preamble to the treaty, stating the parties making the covenant. In this case, the two parties were the Lord and the children of Israel. Verses 2-13: the

historical prologue, listing what the king had done for His servants in the past. Verses 14-24: the stipulations of the covenant. Finally, verses 25-28: the writing and the depositing of the agreement. So, Joshua 24:1-28 is structured in the form of an ancient covenant treaty. Of course we know that it is more than the record of a covenant treaty -- it's the Word of God. It was the Word of God then, and it's the Word of God to us today.

The end of verse 15 is one of the most well-known and most frequently memorized statements in the Bible: "*But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*" What a great testimony! At this time, Joshua would have been at least a grandfather, and probably a great-grandfather, so his "house" would include quite an extended family. It would have been hard for Joshua to make this statement if part of his family was not following the Lord.

What a wonderful blessing it would be if, in the golden years of our lives, we could say, "*as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*" Let me direct this comment to you men: when you're a grandfather, what would you rather be – a billionaire leaving lots of money to your family members who are **not** following the Lord, or a patriarch leaving a godly heritage to your children and grandchildren who all love the Lord and are faithfully following Him? I hope the answer is obvious to everyone here. What a blessing it is, in the golden years of your life, to be able to say, "*as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*"

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Faithful believers cannot serve two masters.

In verse 19 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.*" In other words, you can't serve the Lord as long as you're holding onto foreign gods! The people would only be able to serve the Lord if they got rid of these foreign gods. Verse 14: "*Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!*"

In verse 23 Joshua said, "*put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel.*" Apparently the children of Israel had collected some idols and cultic objects in the land of Canaan, and they may even have still possessed cultic objects that they had brought along with them from Egypt. So now we see the occasion of Joshua's well-known statement in verse 15: "*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.*" Joshua was saying, in other words, "You can't serve the Lord if you're going to continue to carry around these foreign gods and cult objects. Make up your mind which god you're going to follow – but my family and I will serve the LORD! So, Israel, if you want to serve the Lord, you have to get rid of these foreign gods; you can't serve God and 'gods' at the same time!"

Faithful believers can't serve two masters. In Matthew 6:24 the Lord Jesus said, *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."* The particular "other master" that the Lord had in mind was money-- that's the meaning of the word *mammon*. Let me ask you: do you believe the Lord on this subject? A lot of Christians don't! There are Christians who really think that they can serve God and at the same time work hard to get as rich as possible! Do you know what the Lord says to that? That's impossible! Can't be done!

Now notice that I didn't say a faithful Christian can't be rich, or that God may not make a faithful Christian rich. (I kind of wish the Lord would test me in this area! That's a joke, by the way!) But the point is this -- if you try to get rich, then you'll be serving two masters -- and that can't be done. Just as the idols of Egypt and Canaan became 'gods' to Israel, money will become a 'god' to you. If trying to get rich is anywhere on your priority list, watch out! Be warned! It will work itself up the priority list until it becomes your master. 1 Timothy 6:9 says, *"those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition."* Notice -- it doesn't say people who try to get rich may fall into a temptation and snare. No! It says they will fall into a temptation and a snare! There's no doubt about it! You can't serve God and money.

Obviously money is not the only 'god' that Christians can try to serve, but it's a big one and a dangerous one. Remember, faithful believers can't serve two masters!

2. Faithful believers cannot lead two lives.

Several times in this passage, the people responded to Joshua's challenge with *"We will serve the Lord!"* So in verses 22-23 Joshua said to them, *"You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him."* And they said, *"We are witnesses!"* "Now therefore," he said, *"put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel."*

Joshua would say this same thing if he were addressing our nation today, or even any church today. Think of our nation. We still witness to our national motto, "In God We Trust." We still witness to "One nation under God" in our Pledge of Allegiance. But basically, what Joshua was saying is that if you really mean it and you're witnessing to that, then let your life prove it. If you're going to serve the Lord, you've got to put away the foreign gods and not lead two lives. Prove what you say by what you do.

About 500 years before this time, in this very place, Shechem, the patriarch Jacob challenged his household to do the same thing -- Put away your foreign gods! Genesis 35:2-4: *"And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone. So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which*

were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem.” We assume that the people in Joshua’s time followed through with this same commitment, and maybe they buried the foreign cultic objects and idols in the same place in Shechem as Jacob’s household buried their foreign idols 500 years before.

Do you see the lesson for us? Some of us may need to bury some idols! We may need to stop trying to live two lives. Remember -- idols are anything that takes us away from God being Number One in our lives and in our lifestyles.

Are you living two lives because of some idols in your life right now? Are people seeing the “real you” on Sunday mornings, or do you live another life on week days? What choices do you make when no one is watching, and no one will know? That’s the real test of character. For example, what cable TV channels or internet sites do you check out when you are channel surfing alone? Maybe some of us need to put away a few “foreign gods” that are shoving God out of His proper place in our lives. Faithful believers **cannot** lead two lives!

Practical Application

You must surrender before you can serve.

What was the difference between Joshua’s statement, *“as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD”* (v15) and the people’s statement, *“The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey”* (v24)? What was the difference? The key difference was that Joshua had surrendered his life to the Lord -- but the people had not! Oh sure, the people may have buried the idols of their foreign gods and their cultic objects. Maybe they had a kind of “revival” in their lives, and maybe they did serve the Lord for a while. But their “commitment” was short-lived. It wasn’t long before the people went back to their old ways and picked up with the foreign gods once again. Read the book of Judges in this connection. Why did this happen? It happened because the people had never really surrendered their lives to the Lord as Joshua had.

You must surrender before you can serve. Have you truly surrendered your life to the Lord, or are you just going through the motions of commitment, and of serving Him? I’m not talking about becoming a Christian; I’m talking about being a Christian – about living out your commitment to Jesus Christ! Romans 12:1 says *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”* Have you come to the place in your Christian life where you have surrendered yourself to serve the Lord in whatever way He chooses? Not every Christian has come to that place. It doesn’t happen automatically. You’ve got to do it -- by an act of your will.

Have you come to the place where you have presented yourself before the Lord, and truly surrendered your life to Him by an act of your will? We must surrender before we can serve.