

Exodus

Sermon #15: Choose This Day!

Joshua 24, Deuteronomy 8

Dr. Matt Cassidy---- November 24, 2024

You can turn in your Bibles to Joshua 24, please. This is the last week of our series. We've had a semester-long series on the epic of the exodus. And the Israelites are home now. This is Joshua. Joshua 24 is the last chapter of Joshua, and these are the last words of General Joshua. He's a hundred years old, and he has lived a faithful, courageous life serving the Lord. And this is his last act of service to the nation of Israel. He comes to them and says, *There's one last thing I'd like to give you.*

And he brings a revival. Joshua 24 is a revival. He's preaching like Billy Graham, except in military formalwear. He's holding a revival, and some people need to repent, and some people just need to renew their faith. But he understands his audience. He knows it's a fickle crowd—they could be worshiping the Lord on Sunday, and on Tuesday they're dancing around a golden calf they've turned into a thing of worship.

Joshua 24:14-15

“Now fear the LORD and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the 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 forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

So, he says in this in Joshua 24. It might be familiar to some of you. He says, “Now fear Jehovah and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve only Jehovah. But if serving Jehovah seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods

your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living.” And then he says, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

This is towards the end of his revival message, and this is his altar call: “As for me and my house, we’re going to serve the LORD.” And it was quite the revival. Wow—the whole nation agrees to surrender and worship and serve only Yahweh.

And then I enjoy this part especially, because Joshua, after hearing everyone respond, *Oh, we’re going to serve the Lord*, grabs this giant rock. And he says, *Now listen. This rock has been listening, and it heard everything. And this rock will now be a witness to your promises that you made. This rock will call us out if we’re not true.* And then he takes that rock, and he puts it just outside the sanctuary under this giant oak tree. The point is that every time they come to worship and they see that big rock, they say, *Hey, that rock says that this is about the faithfulness of God, and we need to be faithful to Him.*

Thirty-three years and three months ago, God really came in a miraculous way to our youth group. We were in desperate need of a revival. Some people needed to repent, and some people just needed renewal. And there are details I could tell you that would convince you it would be absolutely impossible to change this group without God’s miraculous supernatural intervention. And we wanted to be strong and courageous, and we prayed, and God answered our prayers. We were going to trust Him and obey Him. And He brought His presence into the youth group in ways we hadn’t seen. It felt like we could almost touch Him sometimes. And because of that, we became joyous and looked forward to His blessings. And then, God called a bunch of kids to the youth group. Actually, we kept growing, and we grew so much that we grew out of this campus. And so, we had to meet over at Hill Elementary School. We bought a bus, and we shipped the kids over there, and we met there for two years in their cafeteria.

And the first day that we moved into Hill Elementary, we thought, *Let’s make a moment of this.* We got this big rock. It was sitting out there in front of Hill. And we asked everybody to make a commitment. We told all the kids and the adult leaders, “This is a defining moment, and this rock is our witness. This rock is hearing everything we’re saying. And we’re saying this: *As for me and my youth group, we’re going to serve the Lord.*”



We took that rock, and you can still see it. Guess where it is? Under an oak tree right outside the worship center, back in 1991. It was a special time. And God carried us through the years. I think God is doing something pretty significant at Grace Covenant. Sometimes around here you can almost touch Him and feel His presence.

And I feel like today, as I was looking at the passages, that it's another call to be strong and courageous. Today we're just going to work the revival that Joshua had, where some of us need to repent and some of us just need to renew our faith. But let's make today a defining moment. Let's make today the day that we say this together—let's put the slide up and let's all say it together. Ready? "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Choose

When you look closer at this section here—let me just go through a quick set of words. The first is the word "choose." It says, "Choose this day for yourself whom you're going to serve." And the way the word is written, the idea is that it's not a one-time event; it's daily. It's a continuous "Choose this day, choose this day, choose this day ..."

Alone

But I like the way Joshua rolls out "As for me and my house ..." He's alone. If he were a typical kid, he'd say, *You know what? You do you. As for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord. I don't care if anyone else comes along.*

It's not the first time Joshua's done this. If you remember, sixty years ago he was one of the twelve spies that went into the Promised Land promised by God. And when the reports came back, they said that it was scary and impossible unless the Lord helped them. And they put it to a popular vote as to whether or not they should, one, fight and maybe die, or run and live a little longer.

And Joshua wasn't concerned about being popular. And so, he said then like he's saying now in Chapter 24, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." *We want to fight. Anybody else with me? Anyone? Caleb? Caleb, my old friend.*

It was two against everyone. But Joshua didn't care, because it was a personal choice. And this day, you choose, alone. Don't come to church because you've been drug here by your husband or your wife or your parents. Do it because you're going to serve the Lord. Don't find

yourself reading and studying and obeying the Bible because it's your clique; it's because if no one else does it, you'll do it anyway. That's what it means when it says, "As for me and my house ..."

Serve the Lord

And it's not just alone; it's also the idea that we will serve the Lord. It doesn't say, *Choose this day who you're going to worship*. No, he says, "Who are you going to serve?" And the idea of the God that you serve is that He's the shot caller in your life. He decides what you're going to do with your time. He decides what you're going to do with your wealth. He's going to decide what gifts you're given and then how you're going to use those gifts.

There's no choice here about not serving. Like Bob Dylan wrote, "You're going to serve somebody." *You're going to serve the devil or you're going to serve the Lord. You're going to serve somebody.*

And so, Joshua says, *Look, are you going to serve the gods from Egypt? Are you going to serve the gods that are all around us?* And if he were here today, he'd say, *Are you going to serve materialism or pleasure? Are you going to serve power and the illusion of control? Because those gods will give you what you want ... for a while. And then, they'll enslave you. And like all false gods, then they will devour you.* Whom are you going to serve? You've got to serve somebody.

So, with that in mind, just the clarity of knowing what those words mean, let me just go through the outline of this revival. It's a very simple preaching outline. Joshua is going to remind them of their past, and because of their past and being saved by God, he's going to say, "Okay, choose today whom you're going to serve."

And he's going to go to the present and look at all the blessings that are around them, in light of the way that God has protected them. He's going to tell them, "Choose today whom you're going to serve."

Then he's going to look out into their future where he's living, this person who's lived faithfully his entire life, and he's going to say, *Look, in light of your final days and looking back, choose this day whom you're going to serve.*

So, it's just a past, present, future outline.

The Past

And in the past, it's about the miracle of salvation. Joshua says, *You remember what it was like to be in Egypt. Or maybe you weren't old enough, but you know the stories, right? Remember your past?*

Joshua 24:17

For it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

So, chapter 24, verse 17: “For it is the LORD, Jehovah, our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery ...” *You remember Egypt, right? Slavery, and then you could look forward to death. There was no freedom. You couldn't dream of a future.*

If you could imagine—it's hard to grasp this—that every person that you love would have some kind of whip marks, scars—physical, sometimes emotional. But everyone you know and love is battered. And then, and then, and then ... Chapter 24 uses the first-person pronoun “I” seventeen times. (I'm going to speak for God.) God says, *Then I called you, I delivered you, and I provided for you, and I let you out of there. I took the greatest and most powerful nation on the planet Earth and broke them down to their knees so that they begged you to leave—no, they paid you to leave. I brought you salvation.*

He's helping them remember that. He's remembering the past. And when we remember ours—again, the physical in the Old Testament is pointing towards a spiritual truth of reality in the New Testament. And revival starts when we remember the bad old days when we didn't have a future. We didn't have a hope. We were enslaved to our passions, our egos (remember how gross that was? Just whatever our ego wanted, we fed it). We had no real hope. And then ... and then ... and then ... Jesus says, *I'll come and I'll take your shame. And I'll give you my honor. I'll take your moral indebtedness and pay that debt, and I'll give you my righteousness. I'll take your weaknesses and I'll give you the power of the Holy Spirit. I ... I ... I... all of that.*

Sometimes a revival in the past just starts by remembering where you were and all that God has done. So, keeping our past in mind, let's chant this together as a church: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The Present

Then Joshua starts talking about their present life, the life that's right in front of them at this point.

Joshua 24:17

For it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed.

And the rest of the verse goes like this—I'll read the first part again. "For it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and how did those great signs in our sight and preserved us"—that's the point here—"in all the ways that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed." He's saying, *Look, not only did I take you out of Egypt, but I provided you food and water and protection. You were constantly under my care. And now (the passage says later on) you're under the blessings where you're living in the Promised Land—you guys are living in houses you didn't even build. You're drinking wine and eating grapes from vineyards that you didn't even plant.* This is all just a gift from God.

And just as the physical is pointing towards a spiritual reality, in our experience, we come to know Jesus Christ as our Savior and our King, and we have gone from a place (He's taken us out of a place) where we were enslaved to our passions. But also, we were terrorized by the holiness of God and unable to feel a closeness or intimacy with God. And when we consider the present state of our soul, we've come a long way.

Romans 8:15-16

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God ...

Look what it says in chapter 8 of Romans: “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery”—there it is again, the old term “slavery”—“to fall back into fear,”—no reason to fear now—“but you have received the spirit of adoption and sons and daughters, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are now children of God.” We were formerly terrorized by the holiness of Jehovah, and now we’re heirs. Look what He’s done for us in our present.

You could start a revival in your life by just getting out a pad of paper and just make a “before and after” list. Or just count the blessings, the ways that God has provided for you and protected you, and just the ways you know about—not all the ways that you don’t know about. Take a moment and enjoy that. See what happens to your soul.

I want to spend a little more time on the present. (We’re doing the past, the present, and the future.) In the present part, what does it mean to serve the Lord? “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” What does that mean? I’ll try to give you as many details as possible with the little time that we have. But here’s how I define it: it’s when your heart truly believes that God is great—when times are bad and when times are good. It means that the essence of who you are has the faith to believe that God is good. And God is good in times when it’s painful and in times when there is great prosperity. That’s what it means.

And the reason I have this definition is because Deuteronomy 8 looks an awful lot like Joshua 24, when a revival is taking place then as well. But in Deuteronomy 8 he starts talking about hard times and how we’re supposed to be thinking about that and feeling about that and what we’re to do about it.

Deuteronomy 8:2

And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

Chapter 8, verse 2 says: “And you shall remember all the way which Jehovah your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He”—here’s the point of it—“might humble you. He was testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”

So, in this case it’s Moses saying, *Look, you remember the forty years in the wilderness? All that was like a test. It was to humble you, it was to test you, it was to show you what was in your inner soul.* The word “heart” in chapter 8 of Deuteronomy is used four times, because that’s the theme. “Heart” means intellect, how you make sense, how you reason. And then it means emotion, how you feel about circumstances going on around you. And ultimately, it means your will—what are you going to choose to do? In this case, are you going to choose to keep the commandments of God, whether times are good or bad?

And the whole purpose of the difficulties they had in the desert, which we’ve mentioned multiple times, was to grow them/us strong, to help them/us understand what’s really going on inside their/our souls—intellect, emotion, will.

I’m only going to obey God if He blesses me—that’s emotion. It’s hard times, therefore God must hate me. What do I think? If I’m in the desert, God is not great, and He is definitely not good.

So, there’s that proverb from India that says, “What a man is filled with spills out when he gets bumped.” And it means that out in the wilderness of our lives, what happens where there are three or four days when things are not going well? What bumps out?

It’s been a joy to be part of a church like Grace all these years, because I’ve seen men and women that have been bumped, and they were steadfast and resolved that their life circumstances didn’t determine God’s goodness, His greatness, or their obedience.

I love spending time with older saints who have battle scars because they held tough. In Israel’s case, it says, literally, “Ten times [God is speaking] I have tested you and ten times you have failed.” *Ten times you went to anger or rage or self-pity, and then you’re thinking that you*

will start blaming me, that I don't love you and I wanted to take you to the desert to kill you? What?

In response to understanding the fullness of what was going on in the desert experience that they had, Moses says this in verses 3 through 5 of chapter 8. He's explaining the goodness of God. *He was humbling you. He was letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna. None of your forefathers knew what manna was. This is a new thing He invented just for you guys.* And He did it to teach the people that you do not live by bread alone (sounds like a quote, doesn't it?). You don't live by bread alone, but you live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. *You spent forty years in the desert and your clothes never wore out. Your feet never swelled. No one got a single blister. That was God protecting you the whole time. That's God being good.*

Deuteronomy 8:5

Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son.

And then the very next sentence after explaining that, he says, "Thus you are to know in your heart that Jehovah your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son." I would say disciplining is also there. *He was disciplining you, just like a loving father trains up his son for success, to have a healthy soul.* So, he puts him through some obstacle courses in life to see what happens when he gets bumped and what spills out.

The point is that the hard times, all those desert years, that was just getting us to a place where we could truly believe, the way we think, the way we feel, and what we choose in death, that God is good, and God is great. And therefore, I will serve the Lord.

And it's not just the bad times that put us to this test. It's also the good times in which we choose to serve the Lord. Prosperity will bump you. You get bumped by a big bonus or a promotion, an award, fame—boy, when fame bumps into you! What spills out? Is it "More for me"? Or is it "Look at new opportunities that I have to be generous or to use my influence now"?

Finding the pot of gold ruins more people than it helps. You might have heard the expression that wealth exaggerates a personality, or exaggerates the soul's claws. And you can see this, for better or worse, actually.

Deuteronomy 8:13-14, 17-18

When your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

¹⁷ Be careful not to say, “My own ability and skill have gotten me this wealth.” ¹⁸ You must remember the LORD your God, for He is the one who gives ability to get wealth.

Moses says this in Deuteronomy 8 when he's asking if Israel is going to serve the Lord, where their heart is. He says, “When your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget Jehovah your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

And then just a few verses later: “Be careful not to say, ‘My own ability and skill have gotten me this wealth.’ You must remember that it was Jehovah your God, for He is the one who gives you the ability to get wealth.”

The point is that sometimes when things are great and we're in high cotton, instead of remembering and living and obeying because God is good and God is great, we find ourselves making up our own rules. Have you noticed that the more powerful some people become, the more they break the rules? Because the rules are for other people. They're the über-man. They have different standards. We've got to remember that God said what He said.

And so, God disciplines us like a father disciplines his son or his daughter, to make their souls strong, to make them what they were meant to be. It's a loving father's perspective. And if we forget what God has done in the hard times and in the great times, nastiness spills over. We are impossible to live with. And something has to be done to fix that.

When Melinda and I were living in southern California, we were in a home group. And the couple that hosted it were extravagant in many ways. And they had a seventeen-year-old

daughter at that time. And their house was a beautiful house. It was pretty big, and it was on the top of a hill. And she had a bedroom upstairs, and her bedroom had a view of the valley. So, at night she could see the whole of the southern California valley lit up. She had a closet that was packed full of clothing. As a matter of fact, there was not enough room in the closet for all her clothes. She had her own car. And so, again, she was living in high cotton, right?

Was she grateful? There was one word to describe her—intolerable. Intolerable. She was as proud as a peacock, conceited, ungrateful. No matter what her family was giving her, it was never enough. And so, to really understand what's happening in this house, the father, when he was seventeen years old, had such an abusive family that he ran away from home. And he hitchhiked from Florida to California. And that wasn't far enough away from his family. So, he begged a recruiter to waive some standards and let him go to Vietnam. He begged to go to the Vietnam War. Have you heard those stories? Not a lot of people did that.

He became a Special Forces Army Ranger and did his tour there. So, there kind of a Grand Canyon between her experience and his experience at seventeen. And he's just hearing about how ungrateful and how unfortunate her life has been. And then one morning at breakfast, he kind of snapped. And when she came home, she came home to a different reality. He said, "Your wish has come true. You can live any way you want. I'm going to give you everything that belongs to you, and it's not as much as you think. But I'm going to do this for you, and it's a gift. I'm going to let you live in the garage. I'm not even going to charge you rent, but you can live in the garage."

And then she went upstairs, and she picked out the clothing that she had paid for. It wasn't much—you could hang it on the hot water heater pipe. And the car—it wasn't her car after all. And she thought the bed belonged to her. And he said, "No, we bought the bed and it goes with that room. And that's not your room. But I saved my bed from when I was seventeen, and I still have it." He gave her his old army cot. And he worked in construction, and they had a mud room built into the house, and he said, "I'll let you shower for free, but only once a week, and you have to use the mud room shower." And he did all that because he loved her and saw what spilled out when she got bumped.

How long did she live in that garage? As long as she needed to. She had forgotten all the provisions and all the protection her loving father was giving to her all the time. And this was going to help remind her of that.

That's what God is doing here. He's trying to make us who we were meant to be. If we were Jesus in our own skin, this is what it takes sometimes. So, in the present life, what it means when we say "I will serve the Lord" is that I will not waiver in what I think, feel, and how I choose to live when things are going desperately bad in my life, or God is blessing me beyond my imagination. And when those days happen, this is what we all say. Let's all say this together: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The Future

That's your past, your present. And now Joshua appeals to their future. He talks about how God will bless them if they continue to serve Him and how God's protection will be upon them. But I want you to stop and think about the character giving this sermon. He's a hundred-year-old, five-star general whose entire adult life has been spent serving God faithfully. His integrity is his history. He knows things. He's a hundred years old, and he has something that's a very special attribute. He has no regrets, because he chose to serve the Lord, and he chose it, and he chose it, and he kept choosing it. And he wants Israel to have what he has—a life without regret in the sunset years.

Actually, he wants you and me to have what he had. He wants you and me to choose this day. Choose this day whom you will serve. "As for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord."

The point is, if you could just picture this, this is his Patton speech. Are you familiar with that famous speech where he says, "Where were you in World War II? Because you're going to regret telling your grandchildren that you didn't play a part in that."

Or actually, this is even better—the William Wallace speech in *Braveheart*. Listen to what William Wallace is asking the people to do. "I am William Wallace, and I see before me an army of my countrymen here in defiance of tyranny. You have come to fight as free men, and free men you are. What would you do with that freedom?"

And someone says that there are overwhelming odds against them. "Fight against that? No, we will run, and we will live."

And Wallace says, *You're right, you're right*. "Fight and you may die, run and you'll live. And many years from now when you're lying in that bed, you'll want to trade every day from that day to this day to be able to come back here, because this is a defining moment. Come

back here and have just one chance to tell this king, ‘You might take my life, but you can never take my freedom.’”

What is William Wallace appealing to? What is he speaking to the very heart of these men? What’s he telling them to think? What truth is he telling them? What emotion is he trying to get them to grasp? That they could stay and fight and die, maybe; or they could run and live a long life, but then what? Fear. And it’s not that they don’t have a choice between fear and no fear. He’s just saying that they’re fearing the wrong thing. They are fearing the possibility of a present death. And he’s comparing that current fear to a future fear, that there will be a day when they are looking back on their entire lives and they’re going to regret being afraid in the present. What they need to do is be afraid of their future regrets.

You should be afraid that you didn’t make the right choice when it was time to make the right choice. It’s on you to fear the right things. He’s saying that the future self is going to look back (Erik Erikson). You have two choices, despair or integrity, in the last season of life. And you’re going to look back, and there’s not a thing you can do about it. It’s too late. You’ll trade every day from that day to this day just for one chance to tell your enemies that they can take your life, but they can’t take your freedom.

William Wallace is saying, *For me and my house, we will serve the Lord. For the sake of my future self, I’m going to do what I have to do right now. I’m fearing the right thing. I’m fearing that I’m going to be regretful in the future. And so, I’m going to do what I need to do in the present.*

Listen to how Joshua knows this to be true, because Joshua was there when an entire generation voted. The William Wallace talk—*We will fight and maybe die, or we will flee and live*—and they voted to flee and live. What life? The possibility of life in the land of milk and honey, and the reality of dying in the desert. And that generation sat here at the end of their life and looked back and regretted it. They wanted so badly to go back and take that popular vote again, as to whether they should enter the land or not.

“It is better to fight and die than to live a long life and regret it.” That’s the point. Don’t live for comfort. Don’t live your whole life around safety. Because there will be a day when you’re going to be in that hospice bed and you’re going to be looking back and saying, “Yeah, I lived safe, I lived for certainty, I lived every choice as much as I could to be comfortable.”

And you could live life where you say, “I’m going to face my fears. I’m going to do what God is calling me to do. I’m going to play my part in an eternal, spiritual war. I’m going to get my hands dirty. And I might fail. Maybe I’ll die. But at least I’ll be in it.”

So, here’s the thing, Grace. Now is the time that you decide the memories that you’ll have in the future. Do you understand? You choose today—this day you choose. And what you choose today is what you’ll remember as the future you, playing back. This is your defining moment, right here. Safe and selfish with future regrets, and you’ll be willing to trade all the days from that day to this to just have one chance, and just one chance, to come and tell the enemies of God, both the physical and the spiritual enemies of God, that they might be able to take your life but they’re not able to take your freedom, to choose that you will live for eternity. You will live, not in the temporal, but you will live for the eternal, the things that will matter a thousand years from now; that you’ll obey all these commands.

So, what will you do with your freedom? I suggest we stand and we answer the question this way. What will you do with your freedom? What are you going to choose today? Let’s say this out loud together: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

[Prayer]

Lord Jesus, we ask that You would put a conviction in our hearts if we have doubts about that. I’d ask that You give us concrete footing if we mean and believe it to this day. Lord, I’d ask that You would cause a revival, repentance for some and renewal for others; that we would, in fact, be a church—for us and our church, we will serve the Lord. We don’t care what anybody else does. We will claim in the heart of our hearts that You are good and that You are great. And we will believe that You are good and You are great in times of difficulty, in years in the desert, in times of prosperity and even fame—that You are good and You are great. And we will obey all that You’ve commanded. We pray this in Jesus’ holy name. And Grace said, Amen.