

Joshua Chapter 24; v. 1-33 – God speaks through Joshua's final words.

First – read through Chapter 24; v. 1-33.

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. ² And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Your fathers, *including* Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. ³ Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac. ⁴ To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. ⁵ Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out. ⁶ Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. ⁷ So they cried out to the LORD; and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, brought the sea upon them, and covered them. And your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. Then you dwelt in the wilderness a long time. ⁸ And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan, and they fought with you. But I gave them into your hand, that you might possess their land, and I destroyed them from before you. ⁹ Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose to make war against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. ¹⁰ But I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he continued to bless you. So I delivered you out of his hand. ¹¹ Then you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the men of Jericho fought against you—*also* the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I delivered them into your hand. ¹² I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, *also* the two kings of the Amorites, *but* not with your sword or with your bow. ¹³ I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.' 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! 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 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.

Introduction

We now come to the final chapter in the book of Joshua. If you have been listening to all the messages I have taught so far you would have discovered that the main message of the book of Joshua has been “the faithfulness of God”. The writer has demonstrated that God kept the promises which He gave.

We also discovered that the book of Joshua speaks of the Holiness of God.

God wanted to judge the sin of the land, and also to establish a clean and holy people who would serve a Holy God and be an example to the other nations.

The book has also taught us about God’s great salvation, which is a salvation of victory, stability and rest.

There are spiritual lessons in Joshua that equate to the book of Ephesians. These books go hand in hand. Joshua is a symbol of our spiritual inheritance in Jesus Christ.

Joshua’s final words were spoken in an historical place. The place was “Shechem”.

It was in “Shechem” that God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land.

(Gen. 12; v. 6-7)

It was also the place that Jacob built an altar. (Gen. 33:v.20)

“Shechem” was located between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. It was the place where the people of Israel had reaffirmed their commitment to the Lord. (Joshua 8: v. 30-35)

Shechem was a special place for the Israelites.

There are two key words that appear in this last chapter. They are firstly “The Lord”, this appears at least 17 times. The second word is the word “serve” which appears at least 12 times.

Whenever you read the Bible and you discover that words are repeated a lot, then please take note because the writer is wanting to emphasize an important point.

In seeking to discover God’s message for the Israelites of that day, and applying it to our lives today, we can divide the chapter into three sections.

The first section is a review of the covenant history of Israel from v. 2-13. The next section is a demand by Joshua to keep the covenant commitment, this is v. 14-24, and finally in v. 25-28 we have a witness to the covenant.

1. A Review of the Covenant history of God’s People. – v. 2-13.

a) The Grace of God at the start of Israel’s history – v. 2-3.

The first thing we need to notice about the history of Israel is God’s “Graceful Choice”.

Notice in v. 2 that both Abraham and his father were serving other gods on the other side of the river Euphrates. There was nothing wonderful about Abraham when God chose him as the founder of the Israelite nation.

He was serving other gods. He was as guilty as all those people whom God had used Joshua and his army to destroy for their sin in the land.

The only difference between Abraham and the peoples of Canaan was that the grace of God was extended to Abraham and He was willing to respond in obedience to God's grace.

Joshua was reminding the Israelites that the nation of Israel, God's own special people, existed, not because of Abraham but because of the "GRACE" of God.

Application

At the very outset of my sermon I would like to make an important application here.

The application is very clear to me. We must never forget about our spiritual history.

There was a time when we too worshipped other gods. These gods may not have been physical idols, or religions, but they most certainly were idols of the heart.

There was a time in our spiritual history when our hearts were NOT following after the God of the Bible.

There was a time when we didn't seek God's approval from the Bible to guide all of our steps in life.

There was a time when we went our own way and did our own thing.

However if we are a Christian today, then there would have been a time in our lives when through God's "GRACE" the gospel message of grace was revealed to our hearts.

Just as with Abraham this was a work of God's "GRACE".

God's "GRACE" is God's undeserved mercy reaching down into our hearts, with the love of Jesus.

Unless we have met with God in the past, we would not be aware of our awful sinful nature.

I believe before God can save us, He must reveal the awfulness of our sin.

When Isaiah was called by God to be a prophet of God, the first thing that happened was that God revealed something of Himself to Isaiah and this resulted in Isaiah being aware of the awfulness of his sin before a Holy God.

(Isaiah 6: v. 1-5 N.K.J.)

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. ² Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" ⁴ And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."

As Christian believers we must never forget where we have come from.

Colossians 1: v. 13-14.

¹³ He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Yes we have come from the power of darkness, where we once were.

We are not there now, we are “Saints” (Col.1: v.2)

It never hurts to review your history in the light of the GRACE of God, working in your life.

If we are a Christian today, we all have a history to the grace of God working in our lives.

b) The Pace of God in the history of Israel – v. 3-4.

We live in a world that wants things done instantly and very fast. We are conditioned in western culture not to wait for things. However even in Japan people are so busy they too want to do things in a hurry.

I discovered this week that I can have a hair-cut in 10 mins. At Tsuruhashi railway station a new men’s hairdresser has opened. You arrive, buy a ticket, and 10 minutes later your hair-cut is complete.

However God works to His own schedule and time table. He is not influenced by our time scale.

In v. 3-4 we have a little lesson in the pace of God’s covenant history. In v. 3 the writer tells us that He multiplied Abraham and gave him Isaac.

Wait a moment $1 \times 1 = 1$. It was not a huge multiplication. It actually took 25 years to finally have a child. It was NOT an instant response to Abraham’s timetable. In fact history tells us that Abraham couldn’t wait for God’s promised son, he took things into his own hands and produced a son through Hagar, his wife’s maid. (Genesis 16)

In v. 4 we are told that God gave further multiplications in Abraham’s family line and Jacob and Esau arrived.

Yes Abraham had two grandsons, but that was after 20 years of childlessness for Isaac and Rebekah. (Gen. 25: v. 19-26)

Application

I would like to say something very important here. Perhaps you have been waiting for God to do something in your life, or you have waited for an answer to your prayers of many years. Well I have got good news for you. God has not forgotten you, he is just working on a different time-table/ schedule.

We are here for God’s Gory, He is not here for our Glory.

It is very hard to accept that God has a different schedule for our lives, but we can trust in His plans for us, not in the plans of our own making.

Example

God’s delay is sending us back to Japan 24 years later was not His delay, it was His perfect timing. God took 24 years to prepare us to return to Japan. We can see it now, but we couldn’t see it 24 years ago.

It takes a mature Christian to trust God when their plans do not fit into God’s time table.

c) The ways of God are a mystery to His people – v 4.

Notice – v. 4 where it says “To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.”

Now why does the writer tell us this?

This is a big question. The bigger question is why Esau and his family, the non-covenant line, get their inheritance, while the covenant family, Jacob, do not receive theirs. They go down to Egypt where, eventually they will become slaves.

(Gen. 15: 13-16)

Why do the covenant people experience hardship and slavery while the others have their reward?

Why do God’s chosen ones experience the affliction while others enjoy their good things?

The Bible recognizes this mystery, and the writer of Joshua recognizes that this is part of the history of Israel.

God’s people often have to wait in great distress for God’s promised blessing.

Joshua definitely does NOT gloss over the difficult parts of Israel’s history.

Application

I think that the application for us today if we are the people of God, is that the “Journey to Heaven is a difficult road to travel”

In 2 Timothy Chapter 3: v. 12 it says “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution..”

Paul said in Philippians Chapter 3: v. 10 that he wanted to know something of the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus.

John Bunyan recognized that the journey to Heaven had many challenges and so he wrote a book called “Pilgrim’s Progress to illustrate some of those problems.

He wrote the book in prison where he was sent, just because of his faith in Jesus.

Yes he suffered but he produced a book that gave life illustrations that have blessed millions of people all over the world.

I am sure that you have read his book. At one point pilgrim was on a rocky road with many bumps and lumps. He found the road very difficult to travel.

Suddenly he saw a sign marked “Bypath Meadow”

The sign pointed to an attractive field with flowers and lovely green grass. He was tempted to leave the rocky road and investigate this lovely place. However something told him that the way to heaven was along this rocky road and he decided to weather the storm and carry on.”

Jesus was very clear about this when He spoke in Matthew 7: v. 13-14

¹³ “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴ Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Jesus also says that our treasure is not on this earth, it comes later.

Matthew 6: v. 19-21.

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

If you are looking for Heaven on Earth, you will not find it. However if you are looking for Heaven in Heaven, then you will find it there one day.

However the way to Heaven is through the way of the Cross.

It is only through believing and following Jesus will you get there.

God is honest with us in His word. He tell us that the road to heaven is not easy.

Because He is honest with us then we can trust him when we have to travel on the rocky roads from time to time.

God will not always remove the difficulties but He will always support us in the difficulties.

d) The history of Israel highlights the power of God – v. 5-13

In v. 5-12 Joshua highlights a few incidents where the power of God was manifested to rescue and protect his people.

God sent Moses and Aaron to rescue over 2 million of God’s people from one the most powerful nations in the world at that time. God performed a miracle in sending plagues to Egypt. On the 5th plague God separated His judgement from the people of God.

In Exodus 9: v. 4

⁴ And the LORD will make a difference between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt. So nothing shall die of all *that* belongs to the children of Israel.””

After God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He parted the Red Sea and the nation of Israel, over 2 million people, walked across the Red Sea on dry ground.

God provided for His people in the wilderness. There were no shops to buy food or places to buy shoes or clothing. He fed them manna bread, and their shoes never wore out.

Joshua tells of God fighting for Israel to defeat the Amorites and the King of Moab.

He goes on to sum up the destruction of Canaan thus far.

In v. 13 Joshua reminds the Israelites of God’s provision in the land in which they now live. They were given cities that they did not build, and they benefitted from vineyards they did not plant.

Application

If we were able at the end of our life to sit with God and talk about the miracles that happened in our life, I am sure that God would show us that He had to perform lots of miracles to take care of us that we were not aware of.

The greatest miracle of all is that Jesus loves us and that He left the glory of heaven to come to this sin sick world and willingly suffer a cruel death as the substitute sacrifice for our sins.

The most wonderful miracle is that God's Grace is free and available to everybody.

Have you received His love into your heart?

2. The demand by Joshua to keep the covenant commitment – v. 14-24.

These verses contain four statements by Joshua and four responses by Israel.

Joshua makes his first demand in v. 14-15.

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! 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."

The response is recorded in v. 16-18.

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."

This style of demand and response continues right through into v. 24.

We need to summarize the commitment that Joshua was calling for.

a) A Logical Commitment – v. 14-15.

Whenever you find the word "therefore" in the Bible, you need to ask the question, what is it there for?

In other words, why is it there?

The answer is to point back to the previous information.

Joshua was saying that in view of the history of God working wonderfully for you in all of these years since Abraham, it is logical that you do not follow other gods who can't help you in the future, but that you follow the God that has helped you this far, and will continue to help you.

It is the same reasoning that Paul gives us in Romans chapter 12: v. 1-2.

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. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Paul had just spent 11 chapters teaching about the wonderful gospel of God's Grace.

He now called for a logical response to surrender all of your live to God and be separated from the things of the world, including having your mind transformed.

b) An exclusive commitment - v.15 & v. 23.

Joshua here does a strange thing, which you may have noticed but not really fully understood. Please look at v. 15 & v. 23.

In Chapter 24 there is a Hebrew word which is translated by our English word “serve”.

Joshua calls the Israelites to choose between two sets of pagan gods.

In v. 14 Joshua calls the Israelites to serve the one true God. However if they do not serve the one true God, v. 15 tells us that Joshua tells them to choose some other foreign god.

If they don’t follow the one true God, then they must follow either the ancestral Mesopotamian gods or the contemporary Amorite gods.

Why does Joshua do this?

Well it is quite simple really. If you don’t choose the one true God of the Israelite history then you have only really got two options. Joshua was giving them the shock treatment of reality.

He was saying, whether you like it or not, you are going to serve some god. Why not choose the one true God, who has cared for you and your ancestors since the time of Abraham.

Application

It is very true that in all societies if we do not serve the God of the Bible, then we will choose some other god, even if we don’t actually call it a god.

In western society, people worship, cars, houses, dogs, cats, and even children.

If we do not choose to follow the God of the Bible then we will choose something else to try and satisfy the affections of our heart. The only problem is that it is only the one true God of the Bible that can satisfy the needs of our heart.

God created us for a relationship with himself. It is only through Jesus that this relationship can be restored. Only the God of the Bible through Jesus, can give us true fulfillment and peace and joy and purpose in life.

Maybe God is asking you today to make a choice between and all the other gods available today. Choosing the God of the Bible, through Jesus, will be your best choice and you will not be disappointed.

c) A Cautious Commitment – v. 16-21.

Notice in these verses how Joshua challenges their commitment to follow God.

Please note v. 19.

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 nor your sins.

Joshua is saying to the Israelites not to just say the right things, they have to be really sincere in their hearts. It is easy to agree at the time when things are going well, but later when challenges come, are you going to keep to your commitment?

Jesus did the same thing when He was walking on this earth.

Let us look up Luke Chapter 14: v. 25-33.

²⁵ Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ²⁶ “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not bear his cross and

come after Me cannot be My disciple.²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish it—²⁹ lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’?³¹ Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?³² Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.³³ So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

Jesus does the same thing as Joshua, He makes it clear that to follow Him, it involves a real sacrifice of putting Jesus first, before all other, people and all other gods, whatever shape or form that they might take.

3. Joshua makes a Covenant with the people – v. 25-28.

The text tells us that Joshua made a covenant with the people. The Hebrew word actually says “Cut” a covenant. Why is this?

Covenants in those days were a very visual thing. An animal was cut in half and both parties had to walk through the cut animal, signifying that if you didn’t keep your part of the covenant, then you could be cut in half by the other person.

We are not told in the text if Joshua did some sort of symbolic walking through a cut up animal or not with the elders of Israel, but it is possible.

The important thing about a covenant is that it is a serious agreement that is intended not to be broken and it binds the two people to keep the agreement.

Application

Hebrews 13: v. 20, & 12: v. 24 makes it clear that there is a covenant in force today between God and man. This covenant is sealed through the blood of Jesus, it is an everlasting covenant and binds God to honor it.

This means that if you really put your faith in Jesus Christ and believe that He is God’s rescue plan for your eternal soul, then God’s covenant with you is in force.

However you need to be serious about following Jesus, because God knows your heart.