

A Study of the Book of Joshua

Sermon # 12

"The Bottom Line Choice"

Joshua 24: 14-28

This week I listened as one of the popular singers of our day (Alanis Morrisett) was interviewed about her work. When asked to characterize her music she replied, *"I sing about truth."* And then she added, *"My truth."* What she has bought into is the current notion that, *"My truth may not be your truth."* The idea that even the truth is subjective and is not the same for every one.

This kind of mindset has produced a culture in which the complexity of life reflects itself in the restlessness of spiritual indecision and a search for answers to life's problems. It is not that Americans have never heard of Jesus Christ. Perhaps no nation on earth has been more exposed to religious broadcasting by radio, television, and magazines. The name Jesus can be heard on a daily basis. But the value system of our society is shifting and because the old answers are dismissed as unacceptable, there is a prevalent air of restlessness. This spiritual restlessness also characterized the final years of Joshua.

Although the people of God had not yet completed the conquest of the Promised land, they were restless. Some of the people were strong in the faith, making a difference for God in their society. There were others who had sold out body and soul to contemporary thoughts, morals and practices. And in between the two were a large group of their countrymen who had made no clear decision as to where they stood in relation to God. To this group Joshua addressed his remarks urging them to move beyond indecision and restlessness, to a clear-cut decision for God.

Why is that right decisions are more difficult to make than wrong ones. Someone has accurately observed that the path of least resistance is what makes people and rivers crooked. Some of the decisions that we make in life are not that earth shattering, history will see little difference in the cereal you chose to eat for breakfast, but there are choices in life that are important, even life altering. These are choices made by every human being. And we have to live with the consequences.

Joshua begins by rehearsing for them all that God had done for them. Beginning in verse three, speaking on the behalf of God Joshua, seventeen times in rapid-fire succession Joshua shouts aloud for the Lord, *"... I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and (1) multiplied his descendants and (1) gave him Isaac. (4) To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau..... (5) I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out..... (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.... (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."*

He is asking them to examine the facts and then decide.

Joshua's primary concern is crystal-clear; He wants them to know who the real God is. It is not with the might of their swords or bows that the victory has been won, but by the power of God. God had done it all. But the people nevertheless have to choose God for themselves – intelligently, decisively and willingly.

This is the God who made heaven and earth. This is the God who loved man too much to leave him in his sin. This is the God who demonstrated His love by sending His only son to earth to live among us. This is the God who knew that we could never earn our way into heaven by good works, so he went to the cross bearing our sins. This is the God whom the grave could not hold, and rose victoriously from the grave. This is the God who established the church and who is coming back in the form of His Son to bring all of human history to an culmination. This is the God, that we are called to serve.

WE CHOOSE WHO WE WILL SERVE

“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. ...”

There can be little doubt about what Joshua is after. The word “serve” appears seven times in verses fourteen and fifteen. Joshua that day called for a decision that would help end the spiritual, intellectual and moral restlessness that marked so many lives. Joshua demands a commitment when he says, “*And now fear the Lord and serve him whole heartedly and without reservation.*”

Hundreds of years later, the prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel gave a similar challenge. He said, “*How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him,, but if Baal, follow him.*” (1 Kings 18:21) One translation of this verse renders it, (RSV) “*How long will you go limping with two different opinions.*”

Joshua urged them to rationally consider the options. Joshua now presents them with four options. 1. They could follow the old gods of Mesopotamia, “*the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River,*” as Abraham did before his call. 2. They could worship the gods of Egypt which they are so familiar with from 400 hundred years of slavery in Egypt. 3. Or if they preferred they could adopt the gods of the Canaanites whom they had just spend seven year defeating. 4. But the real God was still an option.

Reflecting on all that God has done (vv. 1-13) it is the only reasonable response to overwhelming waves of God's goodness. The same pattern is repeated in the New Testament, the lavish goodness of God is depicted in Romans 1-11 and then Romans 12:1 calls all men to the only rational response. You know the verse so don't turn there just listen as I read this verse in a literal translation. “*So then brothers, in view of all these mercies that God has bestowed on you, I now make this plea. Present your bodies to God, present them as a sacrifice – a living one, not a lifeless one; a holy one (because it is offered to a holy God), and one in which He will take pleasure. For, when you consider your indebtedness to God, the consecration of your lives in his service is your logical act of worship.*”

[F. F. Bruce. *An Expanded Paraphrase of the Epistles of Paul*. (Exeter: Paternoster, 1965) p. 223,225]

Four ingredients of a true decision for God.

1. We Must Be Willing to Quit Straddling the Fence

There far too many individuals in the church today that are trying to keep one foot in the world and one foot in the church. They don't want to make a commitment that might change their status in the world. And they don't want to give up their sin in order to really be right with God. So they end up sitting on the fence, not really a part of the world and not really a part of the church. Joshua challenges us to acknowledge that it is time to make a decision. Either enter the world and live by its standards and collect its rewards, no matter how temporary. Or make a decision to follow God, wholeheartedly and without reservation. One finally has to make a decision.

The answer for some is, *"Well I want to but not now, now is not a good time."* The truth is that for some there is never a good time. They will not come to Christ when they are up because they don't sense the need. They won't come to Christ when they are down. They are too proud. They won't come when they are in between because they don't even take time then to think about it.

2. A decision for Christ must not be made lightly

Joshua was at this point 110 years of age. He was a soldier hardened from battle. He bore the scars of long-term commitment. His choice to follow God was not made lightly, nor was it held lightly.

In his study of Joshua, Francis Schaeffer points out that when Joshua challenged the people to choose to serve God and affirmed that this was his settled choice as well, the tense that he used implied more than just a once for all time choosing, as if he could make a choice and be done with it forever. The tense involves continuous action. That is it involves the past, but it also involves the present and the future. It is as if Joshua had said, *"I have chosen to serve the Lord; I am choosing the same path of service now; and I will go on choosing to serve God until the very end."* To Joshua serving the Lord was a daily choice. [Francis Schaeffer. *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1975) p. 208]

3. We must be willing to go public with our faith.

Jesus had some thing to say to those who have a private confidence in Him but we are unwilling to acknowledge Him in public. He said, *"He that denies Me before men, him will I deny before My Father which is in heaven."* *Don't say that you believe in Christ if you are not willing to identify yourself as one of his disciples, in your home, in your business, in your social life, in fact wherever you go!*

4. We must be willing to follow through with all that you have

There could be no mixing of allegiance to God with other gods. When Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promised Land they had picked up the contemporary religious practices and had mingled them with those laid out in the word of God. A firm choice had to be made then, as well as every generation to follow. Men must choose between expediency and principle, between this world and eternity, between God and anything that would try to take His place.

WE INFLUENCE OTHERS WITH OUR CHOICE

Joshua ends his address with what has become known as one of the most powerful and courageous testimonies and witness in all of Scripture. Joshua said, "... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." This statement is the culmination of a life lived in obedience to God and His word. There were times when Joshua failed. There were times when he was discouraged, but once Joshua had committed his life to God he turned from following the one true God.

Joshua not only influenced his own household but also motivated many others to serve the Lord. For bad or good, our influence always extends beyond our immediate surroundings.

Verse sixteen reveals, *"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."*

We are challenged to go on and by deliberate, daily choices to follow Christ in fearless faith just as Joshua had. It may not make us popular but it will make us powerful as the people of God.

The book of Joshua ends on a note of affirmation. The people responded. They said, (v. 24) *"The Lord our God we will serve and His voice we will obey."* The bottom-line choice of Israel had long lasting results. Verse thirty-one reveals, *"Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elder's who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD which he had done for Israel."*

Conclusion

Perhaps you need to make a decision for Christ this morning. That is the bottom-line decision in life and when you come to the end of your life it is the only one that will truly matter. I beg you not to put it off any longer. Please remember that when you are faced with a choice and you refuse to make one, that too is a choice!

I urge to not go on standing in the middle. The apostle John described a church made up of people who were neither hot nor cold (Rev 3:15). The Lord said there *"I wish you were on or the other."* But the fact that they were just lukewarm the Lord said he found nauseating.

We are living in an age when just as He has in the past he is looking for men and women of fearless faith, who will step up and step out to accomplish something great for him.