

THE CHOICE
Joshua 24:13-15

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Moses had to be a hard act to follow.

After old man Moses breathed his last on the slopes of Mt. Pisgah, overlooking the Promised Land which he never quite made it to, the job of leading the Israelites on fell to Joshua. Since the Promised Land was inhabited by a troop of native Canaanite tribes, who weren't about to give it up without a fight, the result was years of war.

In the eyes of Joshua and his people, it wasn't just any old war – it was a holy war. It was God – Yahweh – they were fighting for, because the land they were out to get was the land that centuries before, in Abraham's time, Yahweh had promised them so they could settle down in it and become a great nation and a blessing to all nations. Prisoners were not supposed to be taken, and the spoils were not supposed to be divided because Yahweh was the one they all belonged to. Ai and Jericho – cities fell like clay pigeons at Joshua's feet. And everything that would burn was put the torch, and everything that wouldn't was put to the sword.

In chapter 24, Joshua calls an assembling of the people at Shechem. Abraham had built an altar there. Jacob had purchased a parcel of ground from the Shechemites and built an altar at the site as well. It was a place with a holy history – the place on this day for the gathering of the solemn assembly. Everyone was expected to show up – the elders, the chiefs, the judges, the officers – they were expected to show up before God. Notice 24:1 – “They presented themselves before God.”

We all have to make choices. We all have to make decisions. We are confronted with a variety of choices that can make it very difficult to make decisions.

President Lyndon Johnson used to tell this story about making quick decisions. A man who applied for a job as a flagman at a railroad crossing was given a test. He was told to imagine he was a flagman at a crossing that had only one track. Approaching from the east was a train moving at 95 miles per hour. Approaching from the west was a train moving at 100 miles per hour. The trains were only one mile apart. What would the man do? What would his decision be?

He replied, “I'd call my brother and tell him to get down to the crossing.”

“Why on earth would you do that?” asked the interviewer.

“Cause he ain't never seen a train wreck before,” replied the job applicant.

Like that job applicant, we, too, sometimes are guilty of making bad choices and decisions at some point in life.

In verse 14, Israel has to make a decision – a hard decision. The call in verse 14 is to fear the Lord. Fearing the Lord sums up the religious attitude expected of the Old Testament believer. The term comes again and again in Deuteronomy – 4:10, 6:2; 6:13; 6:24. Fear of the Lord is an attitude of awe and of reverence which befits the child of God as he thinks of his Maker and Redeemer. This fear was desired and approved by God (Deuteronomy 4:10). The fear is to come with a heart of sincerity and a heart of faithfulness. The word translated “sincerity” is a word that means fullness, completeness, integrity. It means that there should be a harmony about our fear of the Lord, both internally and externally – our qualities should ring true to our inner being.

The children of Israel had a history of loyalty problems. Wherever they settled they tended to take on the gods of their present culture. Wow! Sound familiar? We tend to take on the gods of our culture – materialism, success, sex, sports, beauty, power. When the Israelites were in Egypt, they tended to worship the sun gods and the gods of the river. Now that they had settled in the land of Canaan they were taking on the gods of the people they had defeated.

So Joshua declares, “You have to make a choice. You can’t continue on like this. You have to make a decision. Are you going to worship the living and true God? Or are you going to forsake Him and choose other gods?” He puts it plainly. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

For Joshua, the decision had already been made. As a leader, he wanted them to see him as an example. He says, “I have made my decision – now you have to make yours.” But he does give the Israelites a choice. They can choose local and regional gods and ancestral gods to their heart’s content. But Joshua and his house have chosen – decided – to serve the Lord.

As God’s dealings with humankind continue to unfold, we eventually come to a place called Calvary, where God’s redemptive purposes comes to fruition in the death and the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. And with that gracious, loving, merciful, sacrificial death that took place 2000 years ago, each one of us – like the Israelites of old – is forced to make a decision. Like Pontius Pilate, we have to ask ourselves, “What will I do with Jesus, who is called the Christ?”

The choice and decision we make in response to that question, like the question that faced the Israelites – will we choose God’s way or our way? – carries eternal consequences. Your choice this morning will mean the difference between eternal life or eternal death, between a meaningful life or a meaningless life.

As we think this morning about life’s greatest choice, I want us to ponder these things.

First of all, I want you to realize that

I. IT IS A NECESSARY CHOICE

The decision to accept or reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is a necessary choice. You either call Him Lord, or you’re free to refuse to acknowledge His lordship. To simply refuse to come to that point of decision-making is really a choice to reject Him.

There have been men in history before who have attempted not to have to make a decision about Jesus – men who have tried to ride the fence, men who have thought that the decision could be

delayed. I think about Pilate who tried to postpone the choice. Jesus stands before the governor and the governor begins to ask Him questions.

“Are you the king of the Jews?”

“It is as you say,” Jesus replies.

His wife tells him of restless nights, of nightmares. “Don’t have anything to do with that man. He is a righteous man. Last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him. I couldn’t get a wink of sleep because of dreaming about Jesus.”

Pilate then poses the question that really faces you today – and faces me today. “What then shall I do with Jesus, who is called the Messiah?” Pilate tries to have nothing to do with Jesus. He washes his hands. He takes the pitcher and pours the water in the basin and he rubs and he rubs his hands – even in front of the multitudes – saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood. I have not chosen to kill Jesus.”

It didn’t work for Pilate, and it won’t work for you. You cannot stay on the fence in regard to Jesus. Even as the Jews demanded that Pilate make a choice, even as Joshua demanded that the children of Israel make a choice – God’s sovereignty demands that you make a choice. What are you going to do with Jesus?

The hearing and the understanding of the Gospel message is to be confronted with the necessity of making a choice. There can be no straddling the fence. Jesus said, “You’re either for me, or you’re against me.”

Jack Eckerd, the founder and former CEO of the Eckerd Drug Store chain, was an aggressive, honest, and highly successful businessman. In his book, *Eckerd: The Right Prescription*, he wrote that he had everything materially that a person could want. But inwardly, he was dissatisfied and restless. A friend had witnessed to him about Jesus Christ, but he was reluctant to make a decision until he was jostled by this statement of his friend: “Jack, you keep sitting on the fence. You’re supposed to be one of these hot shot businessmen who make fast decisions. When are you going to make up your mind on the most important decision you’ll ever make?” Eckerd made the decision to trust Christ as Savior, and he said, “I’ve never been on the fence since that time.”

Life’s greatest choice is a necessary choice. Even as the patriarch posed the question to ancient Israel, the question is posed to you today. Who are you going to serve? Are you going to choose Jesus?

The second thing I want you to notice is that

II. IT IS A PERSONAL CHOICE

The text abruptly changes in verse 14. The prophetic Joshua now assumes the role of an attorney pleading for the proper verdict for his client, trying to get the jury – Israel – to choose God. Joshua demands an attitude and actions which are beyond the normal expected attitudes and actions of men. He demands the same type of response to God that God has already shown to men – that of total loyalty and dedication. Who are you going to serve sincerely, and who are you going to serve truthfully?

The call was for Israel, personally, not to be like her neighbors. The doorway to heaven, to eternal life, is just one person wide. Every person must make life's greatest choice for themselves. Don't count on your church membership – you will not slide into heaven on the coattails of your parents or your grandparents. The question is not what your parents or your grandparents have done about their faith, about their commitment to Christ, their involvement at First Baptist Church of Amarillo. The question is this, "What about you?"

Normally when we think about ancient Israel we think about a corporate identity. But there is something personal about the way Joshua poses the question and the way he gives his own example. "I don't care what you do," he says to the people. "I – individually – me and my house, we are going to serve the Lord." He wasn't going to cast his lot with the people. Joshua and his family were going to serve the Lord.

Every person must make a personal decision as to whether or not they will trust Christ as their Savior and commit their life to Him. Those of you, like myself, who grew up in a Christian home, with Christian parents and Christian grandparents – you stand in grave danger of assuming that you have inherited your faith in Christ. You have not, you cannot, and you will not. You must come to that radical point of decision-making like everyone else who ever places their trust in Jesus. You must, at some point in your life, declare Him to be the Lord, to accept His death on the cross as your death on the cross, to accept His resurrection as your resurrection. You cannot simply inherit your faith.

Jesus doesn't become your savior until you have made the personal choice.

The third thing I want you to realize is that

III. IT IS AN URGENT CHOICE

Several years ago a television news crew was on assignment in south Florida, filming the devastation from Hurricane Andrew. Amid the destruction and debris, one house stood firm on its foundation. As the owner was cleaning up the yard, a reporter approached him. "Sir, why is your house the only one still standing?" he asked. "How did you manage to escape the severe damage of the hurricane?"

"Well, I built this house myself," the man replied. "I also built it according to the Florida State Building Code. When the code called for 2 by 6 roof trusses, I used 2 by 6 roof trusses. I was told that a house built according to code could withstand a hurricane. I did and it did. I suppose no one else around here followed the code."

When the sun is shining and the skies are blue, building our lives on something other than the guidelines in God's Word can be tempting. But there is only one way to be ready for a storm, and that's obedience. (*Leadership Journal*)

The choice of Christ is an urgent choice. At some point, at some time in your life – in my life – that hurricane, that storm is going to come. The choices upon which we have built our life will determine whether or not we'll stand.

The choice for Christ is an urgent choice. Whenever the Bible speaks of salvation, it always does so with a sense of urgency. We're never left with the impression that this is something you need

to think about later in life, at a more convenient time when we don't have as many things going on. The emphasis is always on today. "Choose for yourself today." "Now is the acceptable time." "Behold, today is the day of salvation."

The tone of urgency in Scripture concerning salvation exists because life is so fragile. How quickly life can be snatched away. As George Bernard Shaw stated, "Life's ultimate statistic is the same for everyone: one out of one dies." Scripture compares our life to the vapour of the morning, to the grass that withers so quickly. In our own humanity, we deny death or assume that it will come only at the end of many years on this earth. On a daily basis, we see that it comes to everyone – children, teenagers, young adults. It's no respecter of age. And sometimes it comes suddenly and unexpectedly.

Some of you have been sitting on the fence for years. You're always going to proclaim the lordship of Christ Jesus at a more convenient time.

As soon as I graduate from school, I'll get serious about my relationship with Jesus.

As soon as I get married, I'll get serious about my relationship with Jesus.

When we have children, we'll get serious about going to church, we'll get serious about the lordship of Christ Jesus.

That's an awfully dangerous attitude to have when dealing with how you'll spend eternity. You're presuming you'll have all the time in the world. Scripture tells us your time is already set. "It is appointed unto a man once to die, and then the judgment."

I don't know when your appointment is. It might be today. It might be tomorrow. I don't know when my appointment is. It might be today. It might be tomorrow. But it's an urgent choice – to choose Christ.

The world was shocked by the news that NBA star Kobe Bryant, his daughter, and several others died in a tragic helicopter crash in January 2020. Deep down, we know that life is unpredictable, short, and fraught with tragedy. And yet, somehow, we still convince ourselves that OUR lives are safe and that, in our case, an exception will be made in regard to death.

The death of the superstar reminds us that no one is above tragedy, and we all are vulnerable to weather, mechanical failures, and forces way beyond our control.

Lesson to be learned? Make today count, for tomorrow is not even a promise, much less an expectation. Let those around you know you love them, as today may be your last, and nothing should be left unsaid.

Fourthly, I want you to see that in the life of Israel, and in your life and my life

IV. IT IS A LOGICAL CHOICE

Joshua recounts God's benevolent history with Israel. Look at Joshua 24 again. Remember in verse 1 he gathered all the people together. They presented themselves to God. Then in verse 2, Joshua says to the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, from ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they

served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.”

It’s a recounting of the holy history of Israel. He talks about Jacob. He talks about Moses and Aaron. In verse 6 he talks about that most important event in all of the Old Testament – the Exodus. They were slaves in Egypt. Notice verse 6: “I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and Egypt pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. But when they cried out to the Lord, He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them and covered them; and your own eyes saw what I did in Egypt.”

He describes the event at Jericho as a battle. Now these folks had seen this one with their own eyes. He tells how he used the hornets to drive out the two kings and the Amorites to give them victory.

Normally it is said in the ancient text that God has chosen Israel. But now the question is, “Will Israel also choose God?” It is the very election of Israel that makes their choice a necessity. You see, no matter how you look at it in Scripture, no matter how much God chooses or elects us, we still have to – in our own freedom – respond in faith.

Joshua has, thus, forced Israel to make a choice which never confronted her neighbors, a choice which will determine the nature of her worship from that moment on, a choice which has spotlighted, as no other, the unique quality in the demand of God. In the hour of choice, Israel’s freedom remains totally protected – no prophetic threats thunder down upon her. She is simply asked to view God’s history and determines if it proves His superiority over other claims of deity. The decision is not one to be made in isolation. But Joshua leads the way, proclaiming that his family has already chosen God. When Israel chooses God, she has a leader to show her the way.

The faith of ancient Israel can no longer be a faith of crisis. Did you hear that? No longer can it be because they are in bondage to Egypt. No longer can it be because they need someone to tear down the walls of Jericho. The faith of ancient Israel must be one of sincerity and truth.

What about your faith? Are you calling upon God simply because of the deaths, the sickness and the tragedies in your life? Is yours a sincere faith or merely a faith of crisis? Joshua calls the people to a faith of sincerity and truth. It’s the logical choice.

When you study Scripture, when you study the history of man, the history of the church – how it has survived great persecution, not only from without but also from within – the only logical conclusion is to commit your life to the Lord Jesus today.

Fifthly and finally, I want you to see that

V. IT IS A HARD CHOICE

Notice verse 16. The people say, “We’re going to serve the Lord, because it is logical. God did bring us out of Egypt. He did all that you have said that He has done.” But notice verse 19. Joshua says to the people, “ ‘You will not be able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you.’ And the people said to Joshua, ‘No, but we will serve the Lord.’”

Joshua wants them to see, with his alarming words, that you cannot serve the Lord – that, indeed, it is a serious and solemn promise to trust God. The words, “He will not forgive you your transgressions, your sins,” need to be understood, of course, in its context. Joshua’s question only serves, in some way, to highlight and enhance the people’s positive response. Joshua wants them to know that serving God is a hard choice.

Some of you here today, some of you watching on television, need to know the decision has to be made. It’s either yes or no. It’s a personal choice – you must make it for yourself. It’s an urgent choice – a choice that must be made today. And it’s a logical choice – when you see what God has done, how can we reject Him? And finally, it’s a hard choice – it means you don’t walk the path of the world, but you walk the path of the Messiah that leads to a cross.

What will you choose? “As for me and my house, we’re going to choose the Lord.”