

But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord

Joshua 24:14-25

Good morning to each and every one of you to worship on this, the Lord's day. It is such a joy and privilege to once again be gathered together around the word of the Lord – the word that is not hindered by space or by time but is alive, transforming hearts all across the world. To that end, our call to worship is taken from 1 Peter 5:5-11 which says, **“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.”** ⁶ **Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.** ⁷ **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** ⁸ **Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.** ⁹ **Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.** ¹⁰ **And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.** ¹¹ **To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.**

Let us pray.

Opening song: You are Holy - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWc7VilSOzs>

Our reading this morning comes from Joshua 24, and I am reading from verse 14 to verse 25 – hear the word of the Lord:

“¹⁴ “Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates 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 ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

¹⁶ Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! ¹⁷ It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. ¹⁸ And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God.”

¹⁹ Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

²¹ But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the Lord.” ²² Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord.” “Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied. ²³ “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” ²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the Lord our God and obey him.” ²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws.”

If we look back to the very beginning of this chapter, we can see a number of similarities between Joshua and Moses and most notably, the assembling of the nation of Israel to call for a renewal of the covenant between God and His people. This, in essence, was the last official act of Moses and is now, the last official act of Joshua and it is met with a brief retelling of God's work within the nation's history. It is a retelling of how God called Abraham from a distant land across the river, a calling to turn away from their foreign gods, to follow the One True God who promised, and then gave him many descendants. It is a retelling of the sending of Moses and Aaron to Egypt, a retelling of the miraculous works of God in redeeming His people, a retelling of the Exodus, as the nation crossed the Red Sea, pursued by Egyptian chariots and horsemen seeking to destroy the Israelites, and a reminder of their time spent in the wilderness.

This was a retelling of the way in which God sent them into the promised land, chasing out the nations who sought to prevent this from happening, those same nations who, in the grand scheme of things, were much larger and much more fierce than Israel, those same nations who, if left to themselves, would most certainly have wiped out the Israelites. But through all of this, one reminder stands out far above the rest – God went before them, God watched over them, God alone, redeemed and restored them, giving them all that they could possibly need.

And now, having reminded the nation of all the Lord has done for them, Joshua calls for this renewal of the covenant between God and His people – He says, “**Now fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness.**” The call is to turn away from the worthless idols and foreign gods worshipped by their forefathers. Those idols worshipped while Abraham was beyond the river, those idols worshipped while the nation was in Egypt, the idols that were worshipped during the wilderness journey. However, notice that Joshua adds that a choice must be made. He says that they must choose for themselves whom they will serve.

Of course, it makes perfect sense that the Israelites would respond with what we know as an expression of faith, a creedal statement if you prefer. There is the recognition of what the Lord has done for them and an understanding that what they have now, would be completely unattainable without Him – and this is probably not only because of the reminder offered to them by Joshua, but because they would have known the history, they would have known the stories about their forefathers, and most certainly, they would have known the issues of idolatry which plagued the nation. From their response, we can clearly see that they have made a choice when they say– “**We too will serve the Lord, because He is our God**”.

But this comes with a warning. When Joshua says to them that they will not be able to serve the Lord, it is not because he doesn't believe that they could serve him, rather, this should be interpreted as a warning to them about being overconfident. If history has taught us anything it is that overconfidence can potentially be our downfall. It is easy for us to find confidence in certain things, most of all, confidence in our own abilities.

As believers, I suggest, that we like to be confident of our abilities to come to the Lord in faith, I believe we are confident of our abilities to serve the Lord, so much so that, when it comes to statements of faith, creedal statements or anything of the kind, **Joshua 24:16** would ordinarily be one verse that has shaped

our households, our views, our expressions of faith – **“as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”**. And there is of course nothing wrong with this. Whether it is at something like confirmation, baptisms or weddings, we use these statements of faith to express our trust in the Lord and to express our faith in Him. So often, we do this gladly without hesitation in that particular moment, but the problem is that it fades. Our confidence begins to either wither away or it shifts its focus towards other things.

We have confidence in the work that we do and our abilities to do that. We have confidence in the fact that when we get home, our appliances will work the way that they should. We have confidence in the fact that when I need to communicate with someone, I can pick up my cell phone, dial a number (which in these times, we don't even need to memorize) and it will happen. But so often, and without realizing it or even intentionally doing it, we either create these idols for ourselves or we make idols out of ourselves. What we have then done is taken God out of the picture, put our trust in these things, and hoped for a good result. We, at times, misunderstand the term 'idol' thinking that it only applies to something that is made of wood, stone or precious metals, and of course, ingrained in this understanding is an element of worship meaning – I have to bow down or pray to that specific thing. But what we fail to understand is that this is but one part of it. In essence, anything that seeks to take the place of God or displace God from our primary focus is and should be considered as an idol. For example, we have the desire to spend more time on social media than we do with the Lord, we have displaced Him from our primary focus and replaced Him with something else. We have a desire to spend all our time at work rather than spending quiet time in the word, we have displaced Him and replaced Him with something else.

These things, by the way, are not entirely bad in and of themselves, but it is a warning to us all, myself included, that we can so easily slip into the issue of idolatry without even realizing it.

This is the warning from Joshua to the Israelites, but it is a warning for each one of us as well. We are witnesses to the covenant made with God, witnesses to the New Covenant sealed by the blood of Jesus. In Him is where our confidence should be found, not in worldly things, not in the idols we have created for ourselves, it is in Christ alone. Jesus reminds us of this in Matthew 6:24 when He says, **“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”** Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and all your strength, and love your neighbour as you love yourself – this is the foundation upon which this new covenant is built. Commit yourselves to the Lord each and every single day for He is our God, the Holy and Righteous One, and we are His people, dearly loved by Him.

Let us pray.

Opening song: You are Holy - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWc7VilSOZs>

Song of praise: Amazing love - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVgmdzQCl6U>

Lincon Hardouin
Trinity, Lynnwood
8th November 2020