

Let's open our Bibles tonight - Joshua 24. It'll be our last study in the book of Joshua.

Well, the book of Joshua (I think we've told you enough times, now) only covers twenty-five years. The book of Deuteronomy only covered seventy days - thirty days of preaching (Moses) and then forty days the nation mourning his death. For the first seven and a half years of Joshua's ministry, he led the armies to overthrow what would become thirty-one kings and little kingdoms, if you will. He removed, in those seven and a half years, literally every threat to the people as they began to take the possessions that God had called them to and that He had given them. We read already (back in chapter 13) the LORD saying of Joshua, "You are old, and you're advanced in years," but he would live another seventeen and a half years. But he wouldn't really lead any longer. The responsibility for taking the land, if you will, was now handed to the individual tribes to really, without a leader, so to speak, like Joshua not a corporate work but a personal work where God planted them. And that was really their direction. And things went well, actually, through the ministry and through the life and through the leadership of Joshua and his men. They would not go so well when Joshua passed from the scene.

But tonight we get to his last words - always good to hear what the last words are of folks who were walking with the LORD. In fact, we will come to the end of Joshua's life tonight, we will come to the end of Eleazar's life tonight (the high priest). We will also come to finally get to bury Joseph's bones in the place that he (back in Genesis 50) had asked them to take along when they left the land of Egypt. It is really the passing of the old guard. It is the emerging of a new generation, the second generation in the land, if you will. It is one of the most important times in Israel's history - this taking of the land, the possessing of the land. But tonight we come to the end of Joshua's life.

There's a verse in Hebrews 9:27 that says, "It is appointed to men to die once, but after this the judgment." And here's an appointment all of you are going to keep - you're going to keep an appointment with death. Unless the Lord would come for the church, we're all going to keep this appointment. And it's interesting to me because some people are notoriously late. We have a son that is notoriously late.

If we have a 9:00 gathering, we tell him 8:15. We lie to him to get him there on time. I think sometimes we have a third service on Sunday morning for the notoriously late. I'm not sure if that applies to all, but you know who you are. And this is an appointment with death you will not be late for. We read in verse 14 (a couple of weeks ago, before we went on vacation) Joshua saying to the leadership (which is his last words to the leaders in chapter 23), "I'm going to go today the way of all the earth." I don't know what my last words will be. Maybe the last thing I'll hear is, "Don't touch that plug!" I don't know. I don't think we'll always have the opportunity to plan what we're going to say before we die like Joshua is given the opportunity. Death catches lots of people unaware and by surprise. But hopefully the experience of dying, for you, is quite different than the world.

I remember reading, years ago, of Voltaire, the French infidel who spent his life mocking Christians. I mean, he wrote book after book about the sadness of a life of faith. And yet when he died, he died in a very painful state. In fact, the nurse that took care of him wrote later on that he cried from his bed all night, "I am in the flames of hell, I've been abandoned by God, I've been abandoned by men, I'm on my way to hell, oh, Christ, oh, Jesus Christ," over and over and over again. She wrote afterwards that she would never again take a job of attending to the death of an unbeliever, and she said, "It doesn't really matter how much money you give me." That's how Voltaire - the critic of your faith in Christ - died.

Quite different from Joshua who, in this final chapter even tonight, yells out loudly, with great assertion, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." But he also knew this was the day that he was going to go the way of all flesh. So, you certainly want to be able to say at the end of your life what Joshua says here. Actually he didn't say, "as for me and my house." He says, "as for me" (Pastor Jack says it in a shaky voice meant to sound like an old man) - he's an old guy, so.

Joshua does, in his speech, if you will, in his last sermon, in his presentation to the nation, what a lot of other guys do in the Bible when they give their last words. He goes back into history to prove the faithfulness of God. He wants his hearers to remember that God has been faithful over generations. In fact, Joshua goes back to the birth of the nation, how God had chosen them. And it's a pretty typical practice. I mean, early on before emails or computers or social media, retelling history was a common helpful practice. It passed on the history from one generation to the next. And Joshua goes out of his way, in doing so, to say, "We know what God has done. We know what God has promised us. We learned the

wisdom of following Him, certainly. And we've seen the consequences of ignoring Him." So Joshua's words to the people are, "Look, you've got to decide, based on practical evidence, what your best move is here. You choose today who you're going to serve." And so he looks back at the work of God. I remember someone telling me it's never good to look back, just let the past be the past. And I guess in many ways that's true. But it's never true in our Christian walk. You really don't know what the future holds, so what you have to look at is your past - both long-term and near-term as far as God's work in your life. And so it's helpful, I think, to look back, and Joshua does so.

A couple of things I want you to look for in our last chapter. Number one - beginning in verse 3 down through verse 13, you will read the word "I" seventeen different times. Now that's fairly unusual in the Bible. It is God speaking through Joshua. It is the LORD asserting for Himself, "I'm the One who has done all of this for you," and He uses that first-person pronoun, "I've done it." And like I said, you can go through and circle them from verse 3 to verse 13 - there are seventeen of them. The emphasis is clearly on the work of God on their behalf, not on God's work for them. Second of all, as Joshua goes over this history quickly to get to verse 14 and say, "Look, who are you going to choose to serve?" he mentions three bodies of water that kept people from God's plan. He will mention the Euphrates, which Abraham had to cross when he left his pagan worship town of Ur of the Chaldees, which he had to leave behind. He mentions the Red Sea, which God brought the children of Israel through as they left Egypt and were separating themselves from the bondage there. And then he mentions the Jordan River which was the one they had to cross to enter the Land of Promise. And so all of these three bodies of water speak about separation and God bringing you through them so that you might come to the place where you trust Him and look to Him and have to do so by faith. So Abraham and the children of Israel and this second generation have all had to go forward by faith into a place they knew very little of - except God had led them there.

So we read in chapter 24:1, "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. And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel.' " So Joshua now, having finished with the leaders (chapter 23) calls them along with the people, though, and speaks to the nation as a whole and says to them, "Look, I want you to hear from the LORD." Notice his words, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel." Shechem

or Nablus, if you look at a map today or you look at a current map of Israel, the place is today called Nablus. It is in the hands of the Palestinians. We used to take our groups to Nablus, but you can't really go there safely today. There isn't any Jewish police presence, so we tend to forego those places that we don't have the Jewish police with us. But needless to say, Shechem was in the hill country of what was then Manasseh's land, if you will, in the middle of the country, and it was the place that God had told them to worship, to put the tabernacle, the place of worship. You remember when the children of Israel crossed over the Jordan twenty-five years earlier, they had set it up in a place called Gilgal. Right? The word "Gilgal" means to roll away. "God has rolled away your oppression. You're in the land." And whenever they went out to fight, they would come back to this place where God's presence was. Eventually, as the conquest of the land - at least the big conquest - had taken place, and they cut right through the middle of the country (fought the north, fought the south), that place of worship was moved to Shechem, to Nablus, and that was the place that God would now put His name. It would become their headquarters.

Beginning in verse 2 there at the end, as he said, " 'Thus says the LORD,' " Joshua then goes through these very short biographical sketches of their history so that he might say to the people, "God has always led our people forward, and He has always called us to separate ourselves from the lands or from the people from which we've come out," and he uses those bodies of water, if you will, to speak about separation. But that's really the message. And remember, they're in a land now that God had given them, but they're still surrounded by many enemies, many Canaanite religious practices that they were now obligated by the LORD's Spirit to rid themselves of, much like you and I are obligated as we are saved to put off the flesh, to put on the man created after Christ and to be filled with the Spirit to make those decisions, to make those choices, so that we can walk with God uprightly. So that's really the picture here.

And notice in the middle of verse 2 that Joshua, after declaring, " 'This is the word from the LORD God of Israel,' " he said, " '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.' " The River, the Euphrates, the first body of water. Verse 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. 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.

Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out." ' ' " Look at all of the "I"s. The work of God's Spirit in the life of His people always begins with separation. "I called you out, I moved you forward." Here, in particular, Abraham is called out of a land where his parents were idolaters, and he was called to follow a living God. But in order to go, he had to separate himself from the world in which he lived. And so we read there that the LORD led him from the other side of the River, across the River, and then began to establish the work in his life. Abraham is a wonderful example of how God can take you out of the world and take a ruined life, and certainly a future that would have been limited, and do something so wonderful in his life. Right? He didn't have a Christian home to come out of. He didn't have a believing family. Maybe some of you grew up in Christian families, and you have great advantage because you knew things early. I didn't grow up in a Christian home; grew up in a religious home, but we had no relationship with God at all. We just knew that God judged. And if He didn't, my father would. So that we didn't understand as well. But here, Abraham is the same kind of guy. He doesn't have any reference point to find where the LORD would want him. He's called, and he's called to separate and to follow, and God brought him in, and God brought him forward, and God began to establish the lineage in his life. And, as we continue to read through these verses of God's declarations, it is all about laying the foundation for what verses 14-16 will bring forward which is a challenge to choose based on the understanding of what God has done, or, in other words, based on the faithful history of God's past dealings with them. "The choice that you now make," says Joshua to a nation that he loved and served for years, "should be obvious." That's his argument. His argument is, "Look what God did. Look where we are. Look where we came from. And now you're being asked to serve the LORD. But in order to serve the LORD, you've got to get rid of these people around you. The judgment of God is going to fall. He's going to use you. Don't leave them there. Don't let them influence you. Don't follow their example. Don't take their gods on your lips. Separate." That's what the call is. Separate so that God might work in your life.

Verse 5, he talks about how God sent Moses, how He plagued Egypt, how He brought them out. God did this work. And you will find this pattern, by the way, constantly followed in the Scriptures where the LORD will say to us, "I brought you out so that I might bring you in. I separated you so I have something better for you." Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in chapter 1, "For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Back in Deuteronomy

6, there's a great verse, verse 23, and it says this (as Moses is writing), "He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in. He brought us out to bring us in. He brought us out of Egypt so He might bring us into the land that He has sworn to our fathers." It's all about coming out and then going in. God brought you out of the world, right? You're no longer of this place. But He brought you into His kingdom. You now have a Lord, and you have a Bible to follow, and a word from God to follow after. So when Paul writes to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 6:16), and he says, "What agreement has the temple of God with idols?" the answer is obvious. There is nothing. There's nothing that is held in common. And then the Lord says to us, "Come out from among them. Be separate. Don't touch what is unclean. I'll be receiving you, and I'll be your Father, and you'll be My sons and daughters." But it's that come out to come in. It's that separation. And Joshua uses that as the argument to leave that with the people in his final, if you will, message to them. It's the pattern that the Lord follows.

Verse 5, notice, He brought them out of Egypt. " "I brought you out of that place. I brought you out," ' ' the end of verse 5. " ' "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. 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." ' ' " Second body of water. God brought Abraham out through the River. God brought His children out from Egypt, brought them out. And Joshua is calling this generation to separate from the idols of the land and serve the LORD. But I like verse 7. The LORD says, "And then you stayed around in the wilderness for a long time." That's a pretty good understatement, isn't it? Forty years is more than a long time. I don't know if you've ever gone camping. I'm the anti-camping guy. I would go to Coachella if you didn't have to camp. I like the music, I don't like the accommodations. I'm not a camper. I really believe God sent Hilton so that you don't need to camp. (Laughing) Just my own personal opinion. But I talk to people who like camping. How many of you really like camping? Oh, this is the wrong crowd for me to be talking to. (Laughing) But I don't think you'd like it for a month or three months. Right? I mean, you like it for the weekend, and then you're going, "Man, I can't wait to get back to my bed, my bed, with a real shower and food without dirt in it." (Laughing) Now some of you that have those fifty-foot trailers, that's not camping. I'm talking camping like these guys did. You wouldn't like that for long. And the LORD says, "You were out there a long time camping." A weekend, a week, a month? No. Forty years! Holy Toledo. That would

have got me repentin' right away. Nothing else would have been needed to be done. "Can we come in now? This is long enough." So He speaks about that to them. "You've been out there a long time."

And then what happened? Verse 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. 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. But I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he continued to bless you. So I delivered you out of his hand." ' " Amen! Joshua just continues to summarize history, but all he wants you to walk away with is God's involvement. Thus the word "I" constantly. His power with them to deliver them. It didn't matter if there were enemies large or small. They'd spent their time in the wilderness - a long time a campin' - before they began to move (that second generation), and God, in that last year (we covered it in pretty good detail early on in this book), started to give them victory on the other side of the Jordan, on the eastern side. And they began to see that if they just trusted the LORD they could win battles, they could take cities. Jericho would fall down. And Ai should have fallen down, but, "We didn't do it His way. And then when we did it His way, that was fine too." There aren't many battles listed for us, actually, when they invaded the land except some examples of how God went before them. And He says that here, "I went before you." He speaks about that time on the other side of the Jordan when, in coming through the land, that King Balak of the Moabites had hired this guy, Balaam. And we talked about what an interesting guy this guy, Balaam, was. But let's just say he was a guy for hire. He was hired to curse two or three million people that were down in the valley. And he tried. God tried to stop him - told him not to go, had a donkey talk to him. If you don't listen to a donkey, you're an idiot. (Laughing) He got warned by a donkey and went anyway. And then he saw the paycheck and his payoff, and, "Yeah, I'm gonna curse 'em," and he opened his mouth - he could just bless 'em. And, again, maybe another angle. He just wanted the dough, didn't he? And God said, "I wouldn't let him curse you. I made him bless you every time he opened his mouth." And the LORD was with them, and God did great things, and He delivered them from Balaam's cursing. Now eventually, if you remember the story, they would fall to Balaam because Balaam gave some wicked counsel to Balak. He said, "I can't curse them. Their God won't let me. But I'll tell you what - if you can send your kids out to date some of their kids and bring them home and introduce them to your gods, their God won't put up with that, and He'll deal with them," and

He did. And the counsel of Balaam, if you will, worked for a while, and then the LORD sent judgment, and Balaam died in it as well. But the whole key was, and the whole thing Joshua wants to drive home to these people, it's all about separation and obedience. "God wants to protect you. God's very interested in watching over you, delivering you, establishing you. All you have to do is be dedicated to Him."

I think if you are a history buff, or you like history, just take a page out of a history book and watch how often God protects Israel against folks who want to destroy Israel. Now that's not because Israel is faithful. In fact, the Bible calls Israel the Holy Land, but it's not holy because of the people that live in it. It's holy because it's owned by God. I mean, go back to Leviticus 25:23, and it says, "The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine." God said it's His, and people go, "That's a holy land." It belongs to the LORD. But go through. Look at how Babylon tried to attack Israel, and you don't find any Babylonians anymore. Egypt was a world power, and then it messed with Israel, and it is no longer a world power. The Nazis tried it as well. People that take, as a nation, a stand against Israel will oftentimes meet the judicial hand of God because God has spoken. "I will bless those who bless you" (Genesis 12:3), and I believe it. And I pray our government will never forget what God thinks about Israel because if you come on the wrong side of that equation, you might very well come to the wrong side of the heart of God. It's His choice. Right? But He was always there for them, and He says it here. He was always there. "I have given you the land."

Look at verse 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" ' " - well, all the "ites," the termites, I think, are in there. " ' "But I delivered them into your hand. 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. 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." ' " "I've given you the land." It's interesting when you watch, especially, Mideastern politics, and it seems like whenever there's a peace conference in Israel, it's all about land, isn't it? Who belongs to this, and there's always trouble if they try to build in the West Bank or they try to expand their territories or whatever. And yet the Bible says, like I said, in Leviticus 25 that the land belongs to the LORD. Now if you follow that through the Scriptures, when the LORD goes (in Genesis 12) and speaks to Abraham, He says, "I want you to get out of the

country and away from your family and away from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will give your descendants that land." So it starts with God owns the land, and then God says, in terms of stewardship, "I'm going to give this to you, Abraham." And then you read a little bit further on, and He says the same thing in that chapter, I think twice in chapter 12. Well Abraham had two sons, and only one of them was promised the land. Isaac and Ishmael. Go read Genesis 17. So Isaac comes along, and he has two sons, and one is given the promise, and the other one is (though the firstborn, Esau) not given the promise, but God gives it to the one that He has chosen because, after all, it belongs to God. And you can read it back in verse 4 (Joshua 24), "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. Afterward I brought you out" and afterwards took them to the Land of Promise. You remember the ruse by Jacob and Rebekah, his mother, when Isaac thought he was dead. We mentioned to you that Isaac thought he was dead forty years before he ever died. He was old, and he thought, "Well, I'll just bless Esau. He's my boy, my firstborn. He makes great stew." And they developed a whole plot, and then Jacob and his mom developed a whole plot to have him look like him. You remember that whole story. Well, anyway, by the time it was found out, Isaac said, "Well, I've blessed who I've blessed. I can't take it back." Esau said, "I'm going to kill you the minute dad dies." And Jacob went running for his life to his Uncle Laban's, right? But on the first night out, he stopped in the middle of nowhere to an outcropping of rocks, and he laid down, and you might remember (in Genesis 28) how the LORD spoke to him. He saw that ladder coming down from heaven and the angels ascending and descending from there to the earth and back again. And the LORD said to Jacob (in that place) in Genesis 35:11, "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land." And so all you have to do is follow through. You want to know who the land belongs to? Just follow it in the Bible, and things will be clear. He didn't say to Jacob, "You deserve it." At this point, Jacob was a crook. He's a crook, he's a liar, he's a hustler, he's everything that you don't want to be. And yet, in that position, sleeping on a rock, the LORD said, "I'm going to give you the land just like I've given it to Abraham, just like I've given it to Isaac. Now I'm giving it to you." And God chose Jacob. He didn't deserve it. We don't deserve God's blessings. But the land is God's to do with what He likes, and they should just take the Bible to a UN meeting, and they could solve the problem. But they won't.

So, the lesson of verse 13 and all, and verse 14, is one of the past and how God has been faithful. And Joshua hopes, as he is dying, that the people will take that to heart, and it'll shape their future, it'll shape their present. He says, in verse 14, " 'Now therefore,' " (he's laid it all out for them) " '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!' " Notice in both places they were called to separate across the line - across the Euphrates, across the Red Sea, and now across the Jordan. "Come on. Be separate. Step out from them. Serve the LORD. Fear the LORD." It is always worrisome to me when people begin to take God's glory for themselves. One of my favorite ministry verses is when Aaron's sons are killed for the strange fire that they brought with them when the LORD lit the offering (there in Leviticus 10). But the LORD, speaking through Moses, said to Aaron, "Look, I want you to know these things. By those who come near Me, I have to be regarded as holy." That was number one. And number two, "Before all of the people I must be glorified." Their sin was multiple things, but the bottom line for the LORD's word to these would-be ministers is, "Number one, know that I'm holy, and number two, I want the credit. I want the glory." I have been places that I have spoken over the years where I'm embarrassed by what people say about me. In fact, it's so complimentary I can't wait to hear what I'm going to say. You'll get that later. Don't worry. (Laughing) The LORD says in all of these verses, "Look, this is what I've done. I've done all of these." You go back, you circle all of those "I"s (from verse 3 to verse 13), and you get to verse 14, and He says, "Therefore, because of all that God has done, fear Him." That's the logical response. Honor Him. Serve Him. Obey Him.

And, by the way, Joshua's method of encouragement is kind of the same thing you find Paul doing in the New Testament. If you read Paul's epistles, for example, the outlines are always the same. He starts with what you were. He goes on to talk about what God has made you, and then what God has called you to, and what God has promised you. And then, at some point in that letter, he stops, and then he says, "Therefore, because of all that He's done, your job now is to follow Him." So you go to Romans 12:1. Eleven chapters where he talks about the work of God in our life and for us, and then he says, "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." Eleven chapters of doctrine and theology and promises and head knowledge and things that you should remember, and then, "Hey, now you've got to do something with what you know." If you go to Ephesians 4:1 (it has six chapters, but the first three chapters of Ephesians are filled with

the work of God on your behalf), and then he says, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you" (he uses that word, he begs you) "to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." All right, knowing all that God has done, here should be your response. This should be your response. If you go to Hebrews, Paul, writing to the Hebrews (trying to convince these saints who are waiting for the Lord to come, and life is getting harder, and He hasn't come), spends ten chapters (up to verse 19 of chapter 10) arguing with them that they are in a blessed position and that everything that they've learned and have been exposed to all points to Jesus. So where are you going to go, now that you know Him? And you get to chapter 10:19, and he says, "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, let us draw near with a true heart." And then he goes on and says the just have to live by faith, and then he spends chapter 11 arguing from the faith of those forefathers that they have and how they needed to have faith now. And then, "Just walk worthy of your calling." And so, in every one of Paul's letters, he does what Joshua does here. He just wants to convince you and me that God is faithful and that the reasonable response to God's goodness ought to be service. Right?

There are really three steps in our walk with God. There's revelation which amounts to learning, through His Word, who God is, soaking it in, having a clear understanding of who God is. That's revelation. Then there's experience. I begin to apply what I've learned about God in my life to see (in my daily life) faith and prayer and peace and a confidence in God, and ultimately it should lead to service. Right? I go from revelation to experience to service because service, in God's heart, is an overflow of understanding. Service comes out of the overflow of my heart. It's the overflow of my life. It involves the work of God. But Bible knowledge is kind of like manna. You use it, or it becomes rotting. It begins to stink in your life. So you have revelation, and then you have experience, and then you serve. Some people never get to the serving part.

And Joshua says, "Look, look at all that God's done. You were there. Now let's go serve Him. Let's put Him first." And our little hero here, dying, gives good counsel to the saints. "Let's serve Him." "Serve the LORD," verse 14 at the end. "Serve Him," at the beginning of verse 14.

Then it says, verse 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.' " Now he's a pretty gutsy old guy, and I guess when you're old, you can say whatever you want. My grandma could get away with saying stuff that we could never have gotten away with. You'd have gotten in a fight. But if you're old, you can get away with it. "Oh, he's old. It doesn't matter." But he says to these folks, "Look, you've got to pick. You can go back to where Abraham lived, or you can go back to Egypt. But remember that God called all of us across all of those water bodies, all the way through to the Jordan, and now here we are in the Land of Promise. But if we're going to take this land, we're going to have to serve the LORD." And he calls upon them to make a choice. It sounds a lot like Elijah, doesn't it? You remember when Elijah challenged the people up on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) about, "Who are you going to serve?" and he was standing in front of 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Ashteroth, the female cohort to Baal. And he said to the people, "Look, why are you vacillating all the time who you're going to serve? Why are you stuck between two opinions? Pick a side." And Joshua calls on the people, as he's going out the door, "Pick a side. You know all of these 'I's and all that God has done and where He's brought us through and the victories. Now pick a side. I mean, grow up. Man up. Pick a side!" And I would say to you the fact that-in all of these places-God calls you to pick a side should assure you that you have a side to choose. Your choice matters in this equation between you and your relationship to God. You've got to choose. You're going to have to choose who you're going to serve.

Every church has in it a portion of people who are completely dedicated to the Lord. I mean, we could point them out to you. These are folks that are just - their involvement says, "We love Jesus," and their example shows that they've put Him first, and the desire of their heart is to serve the Lord openly. And it's evident. You can't hide when you have that kind of commitment. There are also, in every church I think, those who clearly are not dedicated to the Lord. Oh, they attend now and again. They usually don't last long because they'll find some disagreement or some reason to leave - blame someone else for their lack of devotion. But those are kind of the extremes - the really sold-out saints of God and those who are just difficult, that you can spend all your time with. And then between the polar extremes is, I think, the larger group, the largest group probably - those who are sort of committed to the Lord but not fully. They're not so committed. They serve when it's convenient, if it doesn't cost them anything. They'll stand for Jesus when the cost is low. They feel no sense of personal conviction. You will rarely find them at church during the week, so I don't think we're offending any of them.

You won't find them at baptisms because that's not important to them (as it should be to you, as a Christian). They're not at the picnics. They're not showing up for ministry outreach. They're just kind of - they use the church to the extent that it helps them out. They're more or less committed. They're really not so committed. And so, because of that, I think it's essential that the church always have some Elijahs and some Joshuas that regularly say to the people, "What are you going to do? Pick a side! Who're you going to serve? Look what God has done." It's the responsibility of the pastors to say, "Look, come on! Who're you gonna pick?" Jesus said (Matthew 12:30), "You're either for Me or you're against Me. You're either gathering or you're scattering. Choose." There are some folks who say, "Look, I'm not against God. I'm just not for Him as fanatically as you are." But God doesn't give you that grace. He said you can't live a life in the middle. "Choose you this day." And Joshua said, "Look, if it's evil to you to serve the LORD, then go backwards. But know that I'm going that way - to my dying breath. I have chosen. My family has chosen." The prophet Elijah chose, and you must choose. You must choose. It isn't that you don't have the information. It's usually a matter of choice and what I've decided. I always find it amazing that people find a hundred reasons to not be in church, not read their Bibles, not get involved. They always find a reason. But they always find a way to do what they want. And to me, it's a great definition. You'll find time to do what you want. I guarantee you, you'll find time to do what you want. And if it's the Lord you want, then you'll find time for Him. It's just the way it is. And Joshua, to a couple of million people that he had died with - for a whole generation had watched them come and go, and now this new group, and they were doing well. I mean, everything up to this point would say they were doing fine, spiritually. It is still the message that he wants to leave with them. And, like I said, you can't live life in the middle, and Joshua's call acknowledges that God gives you a choice. You can choose.

Well, verse 16, "So the people answered and said: 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; 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. 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.' " Now notice the people's response is swift. "We can't serve other gods." Why? "Look how He got us here. Look what He's done. He's our true God. He's been with us, He's kept us, He's delivered us, He's

gone before us. He did great glorious signs in our midst. We're going to serve the LORD."

"But Joshua said to the people," in verse 19, " '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. 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.' And the people said to Joshua, 'No, but we will serve the LORD!' " Now it might sound a little bit contradictory, but in reality, Joshua is saying, "Look, that's a great sentiment. 'Oh, we're going to serve the LORD. He's been faithful.' But you're not going to be able to do that on your own." That's an empty promise. That's like you walking around here saying, "Lord, today I'm going to serve You, and I'm not going to sin." No, you're going to sin. "I've got strength." No, you don't have enough strength. "Well, I'm gonna try." Well, you're gonna fail. And Joshua says to them, "Look, you can't do that. I hear what you're saying. I'm glad that you're saying it." But this isn't just the ramblings of a 110-year-old man. He's challenging them that self-confidence will not get them through and that it'll be harder for them if they decide, now, to serve these false gods because now they're going to deal with a God who loves them, but He's not going to lay down for that. He's also the God of judgment. And so Joshua says, "The choice must be clear. But understand that you can't just serve the LORD and at the same time serve these other gods. You've got to count the cost, consider the downside. You can't play it in the middle. He's a jealous God. He doesn't want to share you with anyone else. You can incur His wrath as well as you can incur His blessings. So, hey, look, don't play around here now. Make the choice. Make it well." And the people were not moved by that. "And the people said to Joshua," in verse 21, " 'No, but we will serve Jehovah. We will serve the LORD.' " And so they make their second affirmation. They said it early on, they say it again here, "No, we're going to serve the LORD."

And then, verse 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!' " This is the third time. " 'Now therefore,' he said, 'put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel.' And the people said to Joshua, 'The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!' " And Joshua says, "Great! How wonderful. You will obey." Verse 25, "So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem." If you will, Joshua adds this book to the five books of the Bible. It is now a written document. In fact, we

read in the next verse (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. 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.' So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance." Joshua puts a stone out. By the way, if you read and have been with us, Joshua's real big on putting stones in places. He liked memorial places. Right? He took them from the river, he took them when they made promises, he had the priests set one up, he sets one up here. I almost relate it to Jesus, on Palm Sunday, being told to shut the disciples up who were singing the Hallelujah chorus, and the Lord said (Luke 19:40), "If they don't sing, the rocks will. The rocks will be able to testify." Visual reminders, I think, are not always such a bad thing. And for us, at least in Joshua's day, that big rock sitting under the tree - right by the sanctuary, that place of worship - you'd have to walk by that thing and go, "Yeah, we made a promise. That's my promise, right there, that I made. That rock will cry out." And so their commitment to the LORD is assured. They declare it, they aren't going back from it. The last words he hears from them, he says, "Then go home." And indeed they part.

Now, I should just tell you going forward that this commitment only lasted for about the next fifteen years. As Joshua died, and then those who were in leadership with him, the generation of Joshua's men, if you will, who had experienced the firsthand awesome work of God, was gone. And the influence that they held upon two million-plus people was also gone. And the next generation did terribly poorly. Now, it's just reality, but I think it's a pretty good explanation as to why revivals, even in church history, rarely make it past a generation. It seems like those who are involved in revivals - both in biblical terms and in world history - were those who began from a place of tremendous sinfulness and brokenness and need for God, see the hand of God deliver them, bring them across the water, if you will, bring them into life; and then, when they die, somehow that experience with God doesn't get passed along to the kids. Oh, the kids might get dragged along, but somehow it is hard to pass along firsthand experience with God unless you follow two rules - number one, you communicate to your children the truth of God's Word, you live it; and second of all, you give them enough room to experience it for themselves. Let them pray, let God begin in them. If they can get firsthand experience with God, then that revival can continue. But that's not the way it went here. And oftentimes it's not the way that it goes. You know, this corporate

dedication to the LORD dies with the corporation, if you will. So, it's extremely important, and we believe it as a church, that we teach the kids as much as we can about the things of God. But we also put them in positions to pray and see what God can do in their hearts so they would know and be able to say not, "Dad said," but, "This is what the Lord did in my life." So it usually goes - here's the generation that knew God and His power. The second generation - they still know about the Lord, but they no longer know His power. And then the third generation knows neither. They don't know God intimately well. They certainly don't know about His power.

Flip ahead with me just for a minute to chapter 2 of Judges, which will be our next book. But I just want to point out a couple of verses to you. Verse 7 of chapter 2 of Judges kind of recaps what we're reading here. But it says this, "So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel. Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers," listen to this, "another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel." And then verse 11 says, "Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD." One generation. Can you imagine?

So Joshua and his leaders had certainly influenced a nation for good. It would be wise for us to think about that in terms of parenting because I run into parents every once in a while who treat their kids' relationship with church kind of like, "We're going to church for the kids' sake" like, "Well, the kids need to be in church." Don't underestimate how smart your kids are. They see that. And the minute they have their cognitive skills developed, the only ones being fooled are going to be you because they're not fooled by you. They see how you are at home. So, yeah, "You can take us to church, but if I told everybody what I'm seeing all week long" So there has to be more than just a passing along of information. There has to be a sharing of relationship. And certainly that did not happen in this generation, although we just read, "Oh, no, we're going to serve the LORD with everything we've got," and it lasted a generation; less so. Twenty more years at the most.

So here's the ending, verse 29 of our chapter here. It says, "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. 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. 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." And then we read, "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. 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." So, Joseph makes it home. Remember in *Genesis 50*, it said he died in faith. "Don't bury me here. When the LORD brings you out, take my bones with you." And here is the fulfillment of *Genesis 50*. So Joshua ends with three burials. Joshua gets buried, the high priest gets buried, and Joseph gets buried. All three of them find their home, right?

So here's the old guard passing away. *Judges* is really a presentation of a new generation. In fact, rather than just twenty-five years or seventy days (the book of *Deuteronomy*), *Judges* is going to go on for hundreds of years. Now, we're going to bring you some charts that you can have on the *Judges* - and how long they ruled and what time they ruled and who did they fight and how the LORD used them - so you'll have them for your study for yourself. But with the old guard passing away and the new guard arising, the question becomes - how will they do? And we'll find out next week as we begin the book. Chronologically, it just continues. Verse 1 of chapter 1 of *Judges* says, "Now after the death of Joshua," here's what happened. So there's no interruption here. But at least three guys died at the end of the book that made it. Right? Their victory was one of faith. They died, believing. They came to their appointment time, and they did just fine, thank you. I hope you'll join us for the book of *Judges* in the weeks to come.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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