

“Day of Decision”

Joshua 24: 1-3a; 14-25

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This morning our attention is turned to one of the most powerful farewell addresses given by a departing leader. Joshua, the second of Israel’s spiritual and military leaders, was near death when he delivered this final message to the people he loved.

You recall Joshua became the leader of the Israelites upon the death of Moses. It was Joshua who led the ancient Hebrews across the Jordan and oversaw the conquest of the Promised Land. Under his direction, Canaan was divided among the twelve tribes, and the people who had wandered in the wilderness for forty years in search of a homeland finally had one.

Joshua’s mission and purpose were coming to an end, though. His life was fading away and at one hundred ten years of age, his death was drawing near.

The last two chapters of the book bearing Joshua’s name record his departing words. In today’s text, found in the second of the two chapters, Joshua issues this bold challenge.

“So now, revere the Lord. Serve him honestly and faithfully. Put aside the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt and serve the Lord. But, if it seems wrong in your opinion to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Choose the gods whom your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But my family and I will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:14-15)

When the people told Joshua they would follow in his footsteps and serve the God who delivered them from bondage in Egypt and took care of them in the wilderness, Joshua replied, “So now put aside the foreign gods that are among you. Focus your hearts on the Lord, the God of Israel.” (Joshua 24:23)

How many gods do you have in your life now? A god is anyone or anything we depend upon to meet the deepest needs of our life.

This includes the need for meaning, purpose, guidance, direction, peace, security, self-esteem, strength, courage, confidence, faith, hope, love, forgiveness and eternal life. Anyone or anything we turn to in search of fulfilling these needs becomes our god.

As my friend, Bo Prosser writes, “A god is anyone we look to who can provide answers to the mysteries of life or provide mystery to the answers of life.”

Where has that search taken you? How many times have you been disappointed? Where are you looking now?

We must not be too hard on the Israelites Joshua spoke to before he died. They lived in a polytheistic culture, and their patriarchal ancestors worshiped and served many of those gods. Joshua was not ridiculing them for hanging on to their ancestors’ idols as much as he was telling them it was time to decide where they were going to turn for guidance as they settled into their new home.

Like a good leader, Joshua told the Israelites what he had decided. “My family and I are going to serve the Lord,” he boldly declared.

This was Joshua’s way of informing his people that he and his family were placing all their confidence in the God who called Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses to this fascinating journey of faith. He and his loved ones were going to serve this God and only this God.

Joshua assured the Israelites in his farewell address that he needed no other gods, especially those created out of man’s imagination and crafted by his hands. Nothing made by human hands could meet his deepest needs or lead to true joy and happiness. Only the God who created the world and promised His abiding and eternal presence could do this, and Joshua was not about to replace this God with a lifeless and powerless man-made idol.

What about you? Do you have as much confidence and trust in God as Joshua did? What would help you to put away all your other gods and “focus your heart on the Lord, the God of Israel?”

What could I say today which would lead you to make that decision? Obviously, Joshua’s testimony influenced the Israelites.

If the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses was good enough for Joshua, then this God was good enough for them. In Joshua’s presence, the Israelites renewed their covenant with God and declared their intent to serve God and God alone.

Have you made this decision, too, or are you struggling with making this exclusive and life-long commitment? If so, let me offer some reasons why I think it is wise to trust and serve the God Joshua and his family embraced.

God loves you unconditionally and trusting this loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength will bring the best out in you. This kind of firm commitment will lead to the most productive and satisfying life possible.

God will help you to achieve your potential and utilize all the talents and skills you have been given.

God will open doors of opportunity for you and give you the courage and confidence you need to walk through each one of them.

God will invite you to partner with Him to make the world better for all people and in turn bless you as you are a blessing to others.

God will guide you when you come to a crossroad and need directions.

God will come searching for you when you have lost your way and reunite you with the people who also love you unconditionally.

God will strengthen you when you grow weak and give you confidence when you doubt your own ability.

God will enable you to persevere when you grow weary and give you stamina when the road gets long.

God will forgive you when you make mistakes and help you to learn from your mistakes so you can pursue a new and better future.

God will give you hope in the face of despair and the vision of a better life when yours has collapsed.

God will comfort you when you have lost someone very dear to you and help you rebuild your life in their absence.

God will walk with you when others have betrayed or abandoned you so you will never be alone.

God will calm your restless heart when you are disturbed with a peace that cannot be explained.

God will help you to be a good neighbor who lives by the Golden Rule by being honest, trustworthy, reliable, dependable, fair, compassionate, forgiving, humble and unselfish.

God will lead you to open your heart and life to all who come into your path so you can build bridges of understanding, goodwill and reconciliation to them instead of walls of suspicion and hate.

And when you draw your final breath on earth, God will come and gently pick you up and carry you home to live with Him and all those who will be waiting for you.

I know of no one else who can do all of this and much more for you and me. Perhaps this was why Joshua said our God is a jealous God. God loves us too much to be unconcerned when we are fooled by an imposter who leads us down the wrong path and leaves us empty and disillusioned.

This is the very reason God sent His son, Jesus, to our world. Through the life and public ministry of Jesus, God revealed His heart and nature to us. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God revealed His immeasurable love for us. Through the Holy Spirit, God helps us to meet life's many challenges and opportunities.

This morning, will you place your faith and trust in this God and serve God to the best of your ability? I truly believe this is the best choice you can make, and I am confident Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua and Jesus do, too.