

Joshua 24:1-19 | Jeffrey Smith

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[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. If you want to turn in your Bibles to Joshua 24, that is where we will be this morning.

And before you take a look at the passage, I'm going to ask a question. I'm actually going to ask a few questions here, somewhat of a series of questions, all can be answered personally.

You don't need to raise your hand or anything. All with a theme in mind that connects to the passage this morning. And the first question is just simply, whose side are you on?

Whose side are you on? Are you with them or are you with us? Let me give a light example.

Are you a Cardinals fan or are you not? Are you a Cubs fan or are you something else? Let me get a little deeper here. Are you a Republican? Do you vote Republican or do you vote Democrat?

[1 : 17] Do you watch CNN or do you watch Fox News? Are you a fan of wearing a mask or are you not a fan of wearing a mask? Do you like the police or do you want to defund the police?

Do you like Trump or do you hate Trump? Everything is so polarized now that this concept this morning of whose side are you on could not be more relevant.

And obviously I joke with the Cardinals, Cubs kind of comparison. Then it got into politics pretty quickly and it's going to get even heavier in just a moment.

And we're going to read this challenge that Joshua gives to the nation of Israel. And he says, and I'm just going to tell you kind of the verse or at least part of the verse that we're going to kind of focus on.

And he says, choose this day whom you will serve. And as I say these words, choose this day whom you will serve, a knot somewhat tightens in my stomach because I do know the gravity of that question.

[2 : 24] It's not one to be taken lightly. Going to my example of a Cardinals and Cubs fan, the lightest of the examples I gave, if you had a friend who, say, grew up in St. Louis.

And when they were 25 years old, they moved to Chicago. And all their life, they were a Cardinals fan. And you saw them after they had moved to Chicago.

Maybe they'd been there for a few months. And they're decked out in Cubs gear. Cubs hat, Cubs jersey. You'd be like, what's the deal here?

You know, like, this isn't how you grew up, right? Are you a traitor to the Cardinals? And this is the lightest of my examples.

So you can kind of see where I'm going here, that the feeling of whose side are you on? Are you with them or are you with us? That the sense of loyalty is such an important one.

[3 : 22] I have a very dumb story, but I'm going to share it anyway because it's just what kept coming to my mind. As a teenager growing up, obviously, I played a lot of sports with Brad, Nate.

And there's a funny story that I like to tell often. Teresa's probably heard this a million times, and I'm sure Brad remembers it. But we used to play basketball, and we used to play basketball actually at a hoop somewhat close to where I live now in South City.

I don't know if it was Jessica Wade's house or it was a neighbor or someone. But we played basketball there, and in typical fashion, Brad, Nate would be on opposing teams most times. And as you know, they're very competitive.

And the enjoyment of the game was not only just being able to play the game, but to see how this competition would come out. And oftentimes, the competition would come to such a head that the game wouldn't end by, hey, you got to a certain point level or whatever route of time.

Like, the game would typically end in maybe some kind of fight or disagreement. And inevitably, someone would take the basketball and kick it across Morgan Ford.

[4 : 31] And Morgan Ford at the time was four lanes, so kind of a busy road there. And that's just how the game would end, right? So there was never like, hey, we're going to play to 20. It's just like whenever the ball gets kicked across Morgan Ford, it's done.

And at this time, this was when Brad was driving. Nate and I were not driving, so we were kind of dependent on Brad to take us there. And Brad would say, well, I'm leaving. And he would get in his car, and Nate was like, well, I'm going to go to my grandma's house.

And it was at that moment I had to choose this day how I would get home. When I go with Brad to his car, when I walk with Nate.

And so, needless to say, I always found a way home. And so here we are in this last chapter of Joshua.

And we're going to look at the first 18 verses. And Lord willing, Mr. Stow will have the last message on Joshua next week.

[5 : 33] And before I pray here, I just want to give some context here. Because it's always helpful just to understand kind of what we're looking at before we kind of dive in. There's 18 verses. The first 14 verses are a bit of a history lesson that Joshua gives.

A bit of a recap as to how the Israelites got to the point where they are today. And then the last five verses, which is where we're going to kind of focus a little bit of our time, is this exhortation, this challenge to the people of choose whom you will serve.

So let's pray, and then we're going to read it and jump in. Lord, we thank you again for this morning.

And we just pray that your word, your truth, the message that you would have would go forth.

Especially this morning, Lord. But as I often feel, I feel a sense of deficiency in being able to do that, Lord. And so there's just a reliance upon you and your spirit to communicate what you would have this morning.

So we just lift it up. We thank you for an opportunity to study your word. It is a great blessing. In your son's name, amen. So Joshua 24. If you guys got your Bibles or your phones, if you want to read with me, this is out of the ESV version.

[6 : 52] It says, Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God.

And just a quick note, Shechem is this somewhat strategically placed city in the middle of the nation of Israel. It's about 35 miles north of Jerusalem. Ironically, it's not ironically, but it's also the place where God gave Abraham the promise of the inheritance of the land of his descendants.

And so here they are, all of these leaders are meeting in Shechem. And it says,

Did anybody catch the hornet reference? It's kind of an interesting... The hornet reference, did you guys hear that?

Did anybody wonder what that is? I was kind of like, what is this hornet? It says in verse 12, I sent a hornet ahead of you. You know, there's a couple loose interpretations here. I'm just going to take one second to explain this.

[9 : 47] But the one that seems to make the most sense is this metaphor of the Lord going before the nation of Israel and inflicting pain on the Israelites. And there's a reference to the Lord as the hornet in Exodus 23, making this comparison of the Lord going before the Israelites and inflicting pain on the Canaanites and the Hittites.

But back to the history lesson here, Joshua has just kind of described what's happened over the last 800 or 900 years. You know, from the point of Abraham's father, if I'm pronouncing that right. I think it's even Tira's father, Nahor. So all the way from that, through Isaac, through Jacob, and through all the time in Egypt, and then the Exodus out of Egypt into the wilderness, and then across the Jordan.

And here we are today. So that span of, I believe, almost 900 years. And ultimately, they're in the promised land here. But did you get what Joshua was highlighting?

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this, but did you get what he was highlighting when he's giving this recap? He says that the Lord, Yahweh, gave each man his descendants.

[11 : 10] The Lord afflicted the Egyptians. The Lord brought the people out. The Lord gave the enemies into the Israelites' hands.

Military victory. He turned, the Lord turned what meant to be curses into blessings. And he ultimately gave them a fruitful land to dwell in.

And so the focus all along is about the Lord. And the people needed to hear that. We all need to be reminded of what the Lord has done.

There's no doubt about that. You know, every Sunday morning we come here and we remember what Jesus has done for us. We remember the gospel.

By tomorrow, you will have forgotten almost everything that I have said this morning. Like 90 plus percent. You will have forgotten. Okay? At a large level, at a macro level, this country has mostly forgotten what has happened in the past.

[12:21] I was talking to my parents yesterday. And I've seen this floating around online, so it's not an original idea. But this thought of, had you been born 100 years ago, 120 years ago, what you had seen in your life, you know, I think maybe born 1900, something like that, seeing a great depression, seeing a pandemic and the Spanish flu, having seen millions of people dying in World War I, World War II.

It's just incredible to have seen what that generation has gone through as it relates to what we're going through today. And I say that because the appreciation of that earlier generation to the points of freedom, to the points of what this nation has been founded upon, have been largely forgotten.

And I don't know if I, I don't think I need to harp on that point. I think many of you would agree that our society has largely forgotten many of the things of the past.

It's been 100 years. What Joshua is describing to the Israelites is a span of what the Lord has provided over 800, 900 years. But I really don't want to dwell on that per se.

I'm really excited about what Joshua shared and how it pertains to us in these last five verses. So if you want to just look with me, we're going to spend our time there.

[14:03] And going to verse 14, it says, Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness.

Take that verse in your mind, park it, we're going to come back to that. It's an important one. And it goes on and says, It says, But going back to the beginning of verse 14, it says, Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness.

The fear is not a fear of I'm scared, you know, per se. It's this definition of reverence, of awe.

You know, you think about when you, this emotion that is felt when you are observing God's power and his greatness. You know, our family likes to go camping.

You know, our family likes to go camping a lot. And so when we go camping, one of my favorite things is to take some time and just look at the stars to get out of the city and just to see the vastness of the universe.

[15:39] And to think the God that we serve, the God that sent his son to die on the cross for our sins, is the God that made all this. If you've ever been to the mountains and you're either in the mountains or you're at the foot of the mountains and you're just like looking up and you're thinking, This is incredible.

God made all this. Maybe you're standing kind of before an ocean and you're just gazing at this immense body of water and just thinking, Wow, what a powerful God.

That is this fear, this awe, this reverence of the Lord that we should have. But he says not only to fear the Lord, but also to serve him. And you think about serving him and yielding our life to him.

You know, we're going through this book in Sunday School, Salvation, you know, contrasting to discipleship. And this concept of discipleship very much, you know, aligns with this thought of serving him and becoming a disciple when that walks with the Lord in sincerity.

What I found really interesting is this passage in Joshua, this challenge that Joshua gave to the people. It's probably not the first time they've heard this.

[16:55] I don't know if you guys can think of another time, but there's a very, very similar passage. If you want to turn with me to Deuteronomy 10. Where it's almost the same thing in the sense of it's not Joshua giving this exhortation to the people.

It's Moses. And similar to what Joshua has just done there, Moses gives this history of what has happened to the Israelites up to this point. Look at Deuteronomy 10.12.

It says, In the communion time this morning, Frank made reference to, you know, Moses spending the time on Mount Sinai.

You know, the 40 days and 40 nights. And the Lord is giving the instruction of the Ten Commandments and other related things. And what are the people doing during this time? They're down there, you know, giving their jewelry and melting it to put together this golden cap.

And it's this just ultimate display of pride and stubbornness and just general disobedience and sin. [18 : 28] And going, this is just painful for me to say because it wasn't my favorite subject. But at the beginning of Joshua, I was given the passage around circumcision, if you remember.

And this thing just keeps coming back. If you go down in Deuteronomy 10, if you look at verse 15, I'm sorry, verse 16, it says, It says, He was along for the ride.

And so Joshua saw Moses give this challenge to the people. And this anger that, you know, came forth after seeing this golden cap.

And obviously, you know, the tablets are broken. But he's saying to remove the stubbornness that prevents the heart from loving God. And to address that.

I just thought it was an interesting parallel to see this repetition from what Moses had given to the people in Deuteronomy and in Exodus.

[20 : 04] And then Joshua essentially repeating this several years later. Going down in verse 16, it says, Then the people answered, And so again, I just want to ask this question.

Whose side are you on? Whom will you serve? The days of remaining silent or passive as it pertains to the Lord are growing shorter and shorter.

You know, you think about public figures. You think about athletes, for example, who are being questioned.

You know, where do you stand on these issues? Maybe in days past, that was a personal thing. It wasn't asked. It wasn't shared. But no longer. In the world that we're in, everything is asked.

Everything is recorded. It is out there. And so it is so important to set in your mind, in your heart, who will you serve?

[21 : 44] Joshua makes an interesting point here that if you find it evil in your heart to serve the Lord, if you look at verse 15, it says, And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve.

The options are not you will choose the Lord and serve Him or serve nothing. We are created as people to serve something.

And it will either be Yahweh, the true God, the Lord, or it will be a false God of some sort.

And so he's saying, choose this day whom you will serve. There is no option C for, hey, I'm just going to be kind of in the background, not serving anyone. Service will be given to something.

It could be a false God. It could be that of a material item. It could be that of a hope and dream that we may have. It could be that of a relationship.

[22 : 59] Whatever it may be, we will be committing to something in that way. If it is not the Lord, we are decisively choosing to serve something else.

So whose side are you on? Who are you serving? Are you fearing the Lord? Is there stubbornness in your heart? And I just want to take a moment just to say, for me, it's a definite yes.

I mean, there's many Sundays where I'm scheduled to speak where I come up here with just an extremely high level of enthusiasm. I am just so excited to share whatever passage that I've been given.

Quite frankly, this one was, it just, it wasn't the same. And it's a reliance upon the Lord. Lord, here's this passage. What is it that you would like me to share?

But also just checking my heart and saying, what, you know, where is the stubbornness? I know there's stubbornness there. I know there's pride. I know there's sin. Where is that?

[24 : 02] And I'm not just saying that just to make a point here. It is, I am genuinely saying this. And so just a constant check of your heart.

Just saying, Lord, where is that sin? Maybe I know where that sin is, you know. And just confessing that to him. And desiring that close fellowship with him.

I don't think I'm alone in saying this. But the last part of verse 15 where it says, But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

It's such a powerful one. And I do just think about the prayer for our children as well. It's one thing for ourselves to be asking the question of who we will serve.

But I do think about how this pertains to our children, to our grandchildren, to those, you know, the young ones here that you may not have a direct, you know, family relationship with.

[25 : 11] But you are, you are, you are, you know, in their lives. And we just, I just want to say one thing about that. We are to raise up our children in the word.

In a gospel-filled home. In a body of believers that is humbly seeking him. There's no guarantee of what that outcome will look like.

But displaying, you know, what that service to the Lord looks like and praying for our children is so important. And Teresa and I will often talk about just the future of our family.

And there's a lot of excitement. There's a lot of, you know, there's a lot to look forward to. There's a lot to prepare for. But also there's some concern there of just what that could look like.

You know, as we kind of see the direction of things, you wonder what life does my children have ahead of them? And, you know, is there a time of persecution here?

[26 : 18] You know, I just want to make the point that it is just so important to ingrain our children in God's word and truth.

To cover them in prayer. And to really rely on the Holy Spirit for this. The pressure is not on us as parents and as grandparents to, you know, dictate how our children grow up.

That is, we can't do that. But to pray for them and to just seek the Lord in how they grow and how they develop and as they get older.

And just giving them this example of serving the Lord, I think is just so important. And, you know, Joshua uses the word serve 14 times in this exhortation.

14 times. And, you know, Warren Wiersbe defines serve as to serve God means to fear him, obey him, and worship only him. It means to love him and to fix your heart upon him.

[27 : 28] Obeying him because you want to and not because you have to. If the musicians want to come up, we'll just close. I do have just one story and one passage to share.

The question of who will you serve. Has your heart grown apathetic to the Lord? And take an honest look at your heart and just remember what the Lord has done for you.

If there is sin, if there is a hardness and you're just wondering, like, where do I go from here? Just simply go back to the gospel and just remember what the Lord has done for you. And confess that sin. Cut off that stubbornness and confess it to the Lord.

He wants us to rest in him. To be on his side. And what a wonderful place that is. You know, I gave the lighthearted example of Brad, Nate, and I playing basketball.

And that doesn't really, to be honest, register on the spectrum of, you know, serious issues when it comes to making a decision. You know, earlier this week I was looking at the Voice of the Martyr website.

[28 : 31] And there was this picture of a house in a country in Southeast Asia. Layouse, if I'm pronouncing that right. And on the house was painted in their native language.

I do not want to see you at all. And so I read the article and it went on to tell the story of two teenage boys who lived in that house.

And they began to attend a Christian church. And one Sunday when they were in church, their father, who is not a Christian, burst into the church and began yelling at them. And he was angry at them because they believe in Jesus.

And giving them an option to choose this day whom you will serve. And they said Jesus is the answer.

And later he threw them out of the house and he painted that on the house. That is a real example of choosing in that scenario.

[29 : 30] And that, you know, that could be a direction we're heading. Peter wrote about suffering in 1 Peter 3. He said, Here's a great end to this passage.

Let's close in prayer.

Lord, we thank you again for this passage. And we thank you for just the words given to Joshua, to the people of Israel, and just thinking about how they pertain to us today.

Obviously, we are not Jews and we are not living in this time. But this thought of circumcising our heart and cutting off this stubbornness and sin and pride that will so easily entangle us.

And I pray that all of us are seeking you, Father. That we are seeking a close fellowship with you. And that we are growing in discipleship and serving you.

[31 : 13] We just really appreciate just the words here this morning. And I just pray that this challenge would be on the minds and hearts of us as we go this week and beyond.

Just in thinking about who we will serve. In your son's name, amen. But you may be Sedan. Comerca, moderation, grace, andczynda rarely. And that the man who tar us for within ..

Let us pray. Thank you very much for that. For more information, we thank you. Cheers. Re■■■■.
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Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers.
Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. It's two.