**Choose This Day!**

**Joshua 24 (ESV)**

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We’re going to read from Joshua. Today, we’re in the last chapter. So this is our last message in this series on Joshua. It’s been a series that has been sweet for a number of reasons, one of which is it’s mostly been just outside. It’s an unusual time, and yet God has been feeding us from His Word through this remarkable leader who needed a Savior, who recognized his need for daily grace. We’re at the end of his life. He is 110 years old now as we get into Joshua 24. Last week, we saw how he gave a message to the leaders of Israel and now he gathers all the people at Shechem. It’s a historic city. 700 years earlier, God promised Abraham that He was going to give him that land. So they’re at the very same city where God promised 700 years earlier He was going to give the people land. Joshua and the people are realizing that. Yet, he has a message for the people now that they’re in the land. Most of the hard fighting is over. They’re building communities and he has a message on his heart. These are his last words, his last encouragement to this people about where they are now and where they would be in the future. I’m going to read starting in verse 14 and read down to verse 28 for us this morning.

***14*** *“Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.* ***15*** *And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond 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.”*

***16*** *Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods,* ***17*** *for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed.* ***18*** *And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”*

***19*** *But Joshua said to the people, “You are not 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.* ***20*** *If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.”* ***21*** *And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD.”* ***22*** *Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.”* ***23*** *He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel.”* ***24*** *And the people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey.”* ***25*** *So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem.* ***26*** *And 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 terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.* ***27*** *And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.”* ***28*** *So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.*

Joshua 24:15 says

***15*** *And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond 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.”*

More than anything else, our choices define our lives. They determine a course for our future. More than our genetics, more than our family back story, more than our obstacles, more than our community, more than our education, more than our resources, more than our hardships, our choices pave the road that mark the direction and destination of our lives. Joshua says, “So choose!” Often, choices we make seem so small and insignificant at the time that we make them. Only later do we discover that the choice we made on one day sort of set a course for us that determined huge matters in our lives. Everything changed based on that one decision that we made, that choice in a moment in time that at the time, it didn’t seem that big of a deal at all.

I remember 13 years ago, going to my mailbox and looking at a postcard from Truman State University. My oldest son was looking at colleges at the time. He was not interested in Truman State University at all! I asked him as a favor to me to fill out the free application. As an obedient and good son, he did. That choice led him ultimately to go to Truman State. That choice led him to meeting his wife, Kiera, and marrying Kiera. That choice led to two little children that God has given them. So if today after the service you see a curly haired blonde little two year old running around, think about that 3x5 postcard. Think about the choice I made, first of all, to ask my son to fill it out and then the choice he made to actually fill out an application. Little did I realize how much of my life would change based on a simple choice that seemed at the time, to be very, very insignificant.

Friends, do you realize that your daily choices impact what you experience for all eternity? This is the message from Joshua 24. This morning, as we open up the Scriptures, Joshua is going to present to us one big choice, but I’m going to break it into three pieces. Door #1, we choose that door and we enter into it, and it’s just utter disaster, eternal disaster. We choose Door #2 and we experience eternal joys, happiness untold.

Joshua is about to die. He recognized that. He’s not long for this world. He’s reflecting on his past choices and he’s reflecting on the present choices of his nation. Over 60 years earlier, Moses commissioned him and eleven others to spy out this land that they’re in. Joshua chose to encourage the Israelites to obey God, to believe God, and to go up into that land. But only he and Caleb of the twelve spies made that choice to encourage the people. The other ten spies chose to give a bad report, to inject fear amidst the people so that they wouldn’t go up into the Promised Land. Joshua, in reflecting, undoubtedly is recognizing that, “This choice that I made sixty years ago made all the world of difference to me now, to where I am, to the joy I have of being in the land, inheriting the land, seeing the people inherit the land.”

The choice of those other ten, do you know what happened? God sent a plague and they died. They chose poorly.From a human perspective when the ten spies chose to give a bad report, they thought that choice would lead them to life. They thought they would actually protect their lives, preserve their lives and their families. But it led to disaster because it wasn’t based on faith in God’s Word. It was based upon their human understanding.

The follower of Jesus understands that one choice weighs more heavily upon our lives than any other choice. That’s the choice we make to follow Jesus. It’s a choice we make at one point in time, but then we make every single day that we live. This choice changes everything for us. It becomes foundational to every relationship, every priority, every behavior, every word, every thought. In Matthew 16 Jesus makes the priority of this choice clear.

**Matthew 16:24-25** Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

He’s offering His disciples a choice. “Do you choose to follow me by taking up your cross daily and denying yourself?” Here’s Jesus’ reasoning. He says

**Matthew 16:26** For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

He says if we choose only for a short temporal time, benefits, what really good does that do in our life if we lose eternity?

Today in Joshua 24, Joshua calls the whole family of Israel together and he calls them to a decision. Will you worship the LORD God or will you not? He actually demands an answer from them right then. He doesn’t say, “Come back a week from now. Let’s talk about it, some.” No, he says, “You have to choose today. This is the day! I’m bringing to you a choice.” That’s what he does. He brings us the choice today. What are you going to choose?

The main idea that we’re going to trace through this chapter is that every day we have to choose what we will do with the LORD God. We must choose either to serve Him or to snub Him, to either follow Him or to fall away from Him. There’s not sort of a middle course. God brings us to a fork in the road, where He says you have to go left or right. You have to choose. You can’t stay on the road and continue making progress without a choice, without a decision. Every day for the believer is a fork in the road. It’s a point of decision.

**Choice #1: Choose to give God credit.**

It’s fundamental to our worship. It’s fundamental to our life. Look at verses 1-13. We’ll read this rather quickly. Joshua kind of takes them through the history of God’s goodness and grace.

***1*** *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.* ***2*** *And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates,*

Do you remember that? That was over 700 years ago.

*Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.*

Then this is what the Lord says,

***3*** *Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many.*

Notice how often God references Himself in this quotation of Joshua, as he quotes God speaking.

*I gave him**Isaac.* ***4*** *And to Isaac I gave Jacob**and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.* ***5*** *And I sent Moses and Aaron,*

He jumps forward in history. Now he’s referencing something that happened about sixty or seventy years ago.

*and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it, and afterward I brought you out.* ***6*** *“‘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.* ***7*** *And when they cried to the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness a long time.*

He’s now talking about that forty years.

***8*** *Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan.*

That memory, again, brings up that flooded river that God opened up and they crossed it on dry ground. Then he says

*They fought with you, and I gave them into**your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you.* ***9*** *Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel. And he sent and invited Balaam the son of Beor to curse you,* ***10*** *but I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand.* ***11*** *And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand.*

Do you remember how the walls fell down?

***12*** *And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow.* ***13*** *I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.’*

Do you remember how I sent those hailstones down upon the enemy? Do you remember how I caused the sun to stand still? I gave you the land.

Joshua brings this message and he is simply reminding the people of the goodness, the grace, the faithfulness of God in their history. Why would Joshua give a history lesson right here as his last sermon, his last message to the people? He does it not to tell them, “We’re a noble people. We have a noble past. We’re really great. Remember how great we are.” That’s not why he does it. He gives this message of history to remind them of where they came from. He says, “Do you remember Abraham? Where did he come from? He came from a people who worshiped foreign gods and didn’t know the true LORD. He didn’t know me at all. In grace, I chose Abraham. I set my love upon Abraham. I promised that from Abraham, it was my good design to create a nation. Look around you. Here you are.”

Joshua says, “I want you to remember where we came from, because God didn’t set his blessing upon Abraham because He saw, ‘here’s a really good guy doing really good things, so I’m going to bless him.’ That’s not how it happened. Here was Abraham. He’s worshiping false gods. God set His love upon him. He chose Abraham. Out of all the nations of the earth, He chose this one family, this one man, to create a nation through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed.” He says, “I want you to know my glory.” That’s Joshua’s heart. He says, “As I’ve lived 110 years, I’ve realized it’s not about me and receiving the benefits and the rewards of the hard work I’ve done. It’s all about the Lord and His grace. Remember that!

Friends, we are blessed by God not because we’re good, not because we’re faithful, not because we’re better, but we are blessed by God with a spiritual inheritance because God in His grace, made us alive in Christ. When we were dead in our trespasses and sins, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. While we were yet enemies of God. So the reason why we even have faith in God and are connected to His salvation is because of God’s electing choosing love over us. This is Paul’s point in Ephesians 2. He says

**Ephesians 2:4-5** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

He says we were just spiritually dead, dormant, unable to respond to God. And at that point, God made us alive in Christ. By grace you have been saved! Then he emphasizes it in verses 8 and 9.

**Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Your faith, the salvation you have is not your own doing at all. Paul is doing exactly what Joshua was doing to this people. He’s reminding us that God brings us into the blessing of His promise by His grace.

This people did not accomplish the beginning of their nation. This people did not win their freedom from slavery in Egypt. This people were not able to survive forty years in a wilderness. This people were not able to cross the Jordan River. This people were not able to defeat Jericho. They were not able to defeat the Amorites and the other tribes. This people could take no credit whatsoever for any of these victories, for any of these past accomplishments of them as a nation. What accomplished that? Here’s the answer. The LORD intervened by His grace with miracles. He set His love upon this people, and now Joshua says He deserves the credit.

Joshua has an interesting way of communicating our need to credit God. He quotes God, as we referenced. My count is 18 times, God says, “I.” God’s message is that He deserves the glory. He’s not shy about taking credit! He deserves the praise. He’s the one who commands the praise. So here’s the deal. Godhas blessed this people because now the land is at rest. We learned that in chapter 23. Most of the fighting is over. They’re building communities. When God blesses us, our pride grabs hold of the credit. That’s what it does! We’re not even aware that we’re doing that. Our hearts look at God’s favor upon us and say, “I’m going to give thanks, but I did a lot. I worked hard.” We are especially prone to take credit when life is good!

At this point in Israel’s history, again, most of the major enemies have been defeated. This is a time where there is relative peace, relative little distress or danger. They were building homes. They’re settling into some stable jobs. They’re adding some comforts to the basics of life; maybe some community pools, some golf courses, some lake houses. Life is good at this point for this nation. What happens when we find life being good? In the back of our head, we begin to grab hold of credit. We think we did something to make that happen. Now for sure, this people worked hard. They labored. They had to battle through hardship. They persevered. But Joshua is reminding them that life is good not because they worked hard, not because they persevered through hardship, but life is good because God blessed them. Hard work and discipline are essential to getting this people to where they were. These things are elements of life that God commands and calls us to. But in the midst of that, when life is good, it’s vital that we remember God deserves all the credit.

Our pride gives credit to our skills, our smarts, our work ethic, our perseverance. Joshua knew that this was a huge danger for the present and future of this people. He recognized what will happen if they begin to take some of that credit upon themselves. Taking credit for our prosperity does not require that we boast loudly or publicly about our contributions. I don’t think that’s what is happening, here. It’s just inwardly, there was this attitude. It’s so quiet that they could have easily denied it, and perhaps they did. “No, that’s not us. We’re not taking credit.” Taking credit for our prosperity simply requires that we neglect to intentionally credit God for our blessings. So if we are not verbalizing credit to God for the specific blessings in our lives, then we are taking credit ourselves.

If there is an accomplishment our children have—winning some game, they’re on the honor roll, they get some degree, getting a job—and we don’t say intentionally and verbally that God deserves all the credit for that, then our pride is holding it in. What humility does is it always verbalizes, it’s intentional about bringing credit to God. That’s what Joshua is saying. “We have got to give God credit.” That’s part of what Sunday mornings are about. Part of our Sunday mornings is that this is the time when I together with the whole community, give credit to God for everything. There is nothing good in my life that I have earned or deserved or created that didn’t come from God and His grace. We strengthen our faith in God when we give credit to God. We weaken our faith in God when we take credit for the blessings that we possess. Joshua says, “Grow strong in faith by choosing to give God credit.

**Choice #2: Choose to cast away other gods.**

We read verses 14 and 15, which are sort of the center of this sermon, the center of Joshua’s message. He says after the history lesson, in view of what God has done,

***14*** *“Now therefore fear the LORD*

Respect Him. Revere Him. Stand in awe of Him.

*and serve him*

The word “serve” also means to worship Him. Love Him

*in sincerity and in faithfulness.*

That means

*Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River*

Before you even entered into this land, when Abraham was still living in Ur with his family, put away those gods. Remember the gods that were

*and in Egypt,*

Put away those gods. Remember the gods you’re also becoming familiar with now that you’re in the land, the gods of the Amorites. Put away those gods. He says every foreign god that you come across throughout your history, throughout your own personal experience, put them away!

*and serve the LORD.* ***15*** *And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve,*

You can almost see their pride. “What do you mean? We never said it’s evil to serve the LORD.” No, he’s earned the right to speak really forthrightly, almost brutally to this people. He’s 110 years old. He’s about ready to enter into heaven. He’s saying, “I know some of you, deep in your heart, you think it’s not a great decision to serve the LORD and worship Him. If you think so, then choose. Make a choice today. I’m calling you to go left or to go right, but choose this day whom you will serve.”

*whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.*

If you choose these other gods, then go ahead and serve them. Don’t stay in the middle. Don’t think that God is pleased because you have hold of Him with just a light little grasp between your finger and your thumb, and all the while, you have your hands filled with this allegiance, this loyalty to other gods. He says, “You have to choose! You have to let go of either the LORD, or you have to let go of these other gods.”

So what Joshua is doing is he is bringing eternal matters to their hearts and he’s demanding a decision from them. Joshua doesn’t demand an answer because he hates this group of people, because he is frustrated with them, because he’s angry with them, because he wants to be harsh. He realized, “I’m 110 years old. I’m about ready to go to heaven. I have to share my heart with this people because I love them. I want their future to be filled with joy. I want them to experience an eternity where they’re connected with God and His blessing.” He recognized, “I can’t make the decision for them. But what I can do is I can persuade them by having them think about what God has done and who God is. I can implore them. I can appeal to them. I can labor to convince them. I know the decision ultimately is in their hands. I can’t make that decision for them.” So he calls them to a place of decision.

Just an aside, parents and grandparents especially, make this kind of appeal to your children and to your grandchildren. Don’t be shy about it. We don’t have to use the exact same words. I know this is really blunt, especially for our culture. But it’s right for us to make this kind of appeal, where we ask them to make a choice. And even the day that we’re in front of them, ask them to make a choice whether they serve the LORD God, reminding them of all that the LORD God has done for them, for their blessing, or to choose the gods of this world.

Joshua begins by calling them to turn away from any part of their lives that finds the gods of Egypt or the gods of the Amorites attractive. Look at what he says again in verse 15.

*Put away*

Underline that.

*Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.*

Often, Universalist leaders say things like, “We all worship and serve the same God. Let’s not split hairs in what we call Him. Some call god Allah. Some call god Vishnu. Some call god Pangu. Some call him ‘Sun God’ or ‘Wind God.’ It doesn’t really matter!” Here’s Joshua who says, “No, it matters. It matters for all of eternity. It matters! Eternal joy and happiness rests upon this. You see, the true God is a jealous God. He will not allow any other god to receive glory that is due to Him. For God to not care about who we worship is similar to a husband or wife not caring about who their spouse is sleeping with. That’s the analogy Scripture uses. Something would be terribly wrong with our relationship with God for God not to care about that. God’s value upon His own glory, His value upon this covenantal relationship that He made with us drives His command for us to have no other gods before Him. Joshua is saying that God is faithful. He is faithful to us. Now he says, “Will you be faithful to Him?”It’s in view of God’s faithfulness that he is calling us to make this decision.

One pastor helpfully writes, “What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living.”

We might not have God’s call to Asheroth or Baal, but we have gods nonetheless who say, “If you serve me with your life, I will give you blessing. Do you believe me?” An idol could be a job, a career. It could be a healthy body. It could be some achievement, some hobby. It could be a child, a spouse. The Lord God says, “You must have me to have life.” An idol says the exact same. “In order to really have life, you have to have me.”

Joshua is really aware of the seduction of false gods. False gods make very convincing cases that they can deliver something we need that the LORD in and of Himself cannot. They say that we need the Lord and this other thing, this other entity, in order to really have joy, really have purpose, really have meaning. Joshua is saying, “Put away the gods that your forefathers served.” He’s not just saying, “Kind of watch out for them.” He says, “Put them away.”

This is remarkable! After all the LORD God has done for this people, with all the miracles; the defeat of the Egyptian gods with the ten plagues, the travesty around the golden calf, manna coming down from heaven for forty years to feed them, the defeat of Jericho with the walls falling down, the sun itself standing still. Our first response might be as we think about what this people has experienced, is: How in the world could this people still worship false gods when the LORD has been so powerfully at work, when it’s so obvious of God’s power and His goodness? Well here’s the question I know I have to ask myself: Am I any better than this people? Are there not idols that I must put away even after Christ Jesus has died to bring forgiveness and wholeness and freedom to me? Even after Jesus has risen from the dead; the tomb is empty! Even after the Holy Spirit indwells me and has given me a new heart of flesh, replacing a heart of stone, are not there idols that I must put away? The answer is yes. Put away the gods! This demand, this decision requires sort of a forcefulness, a decisiveness, an intention. It’s something rather radical.

This word “put away” is the same word that in the wilderness, when God sent serpents because the people were unfaithful to Him,

**Numbers 21:7** And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

That word “take away,” take away the serpents…What does God intend for us with false idols? He intends for us to do the same thing that this people who were plagued by poisonous snakes asked God to do. Take them away. In other words, it’s not just “Could you cut down on the population a little bit? Could you kind of mediate how strong of an influence these snakes have in our midst?” He’s saying, “Take them completely away so that they are no part of our existence, no part of our experience anymore.” That’s the word that God uses to call us to put away the false gods, these idols.

What practically does it mean for us to put away false gods? I don’t know for you. I just know it’s radical.If you’re worshipping the god of lust, it might mean that you disconnect from the internet. If you’re worshipping the god of money, it might mean that you give your savings account to the poor in the name of Jesus. If you are worshipping the god of power, it might mean that you invest your Saturday’s mopping floors for a local mission. Put away! I don’t know what it means for all of us, I just know it means something radical. It’s a decision. In other words, he’s saying don’t make any negotiation. There is no neutrality. There is a complete cut. There is division, separation.

The Gospel begins with the assumption of our present guilt. Joshua assumed that this sin was already in the camp to some degree. That’s why he didn’t say, “Don’t let there be false gods.” He said, “Put them away! I know that they’re there. I know that there are some that are dabbling.” The Gospel assumes that we’re already in a position of spiritual disobedience. That’s why when Jesus began His ministry, what was His message?

**Matthew 4:17** From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

We will never believe the Gospel if we’re continually defending ourselves against the charge of idolatry and of a need to turn away from that which we love. We will never embrace the gospel. The first message of the gospel is repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

Remember the danger for Israel was not so much in abandoning the worship of the LORD altogether, but their danger was in adding other gods to their worship of the LORD. Joshua says, “You have to choose.” Take a moment, won’t you, and pray, “Lord, do you see any idols in my life? Do you see any false gods that are active? Lord, reveal those false gods to me.” Then in faith, put them away. Take action. Turn to the true and living God. Joshua says choose to give credit to God. That’s essential for your future. Choose to put away false idols. And the last part of this big decision that Joshua is calling the people to is

**Choice #3: Choose to worship the LORD our God.**

Serve Him alone. Choose this day whom you will serve. He says in verse 15,

*But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*

It’s interesting, isn’t it? Joshua is saying that his commitment to the LORD transcends his commitment to his own physical family. He says, “My loyalty is first to the LORD.” What happens if one of my beloved family members goes off and worships Baal? And then at family gatherings, this family member wants to bring Baal and maybe pray a prayer to Baal before the meal. Joshua undoubtedly is going to love that child who worships Baal. He cares about him. But he says, “Here’s the deal. Me and my house are going to serve the LORD. We’re not going to mix. That might mean that if you choose other gods it puts you outside of my family now, even though you’re in my family. That doesn’t mean I don’t love you. It just means that this is what we are about.”

I believe that the church of Jesus needs to return to this basic decision. We need in love, to those who are family members who reject Jesus Christ, to tell them we love them, but at the same time to say, “Here is what this family is about. We will not compromise in this family, wherever I’m present, wherever I have control or decision-making authority. We will not compromise. You might tell me, ‘I’m not going to go to the family reunions, then.’ I wish you still would. I wish you would still participate in our dinners. But here’s the deal. We are first and foremost loyal to the LORD and we believe that is going to bring blessing to you. We pray that ultimately will come to your realization because apart from God, there is no life whatsoever. You have to choose! Choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house,” this is Joshua speaking for his family. “We will serve the LORD.”

Here’s what Jesus says in Luke 14. If you think that’s hard, what Jesus says is so much more blunt. It’s so much more forceful. Here’s what Jesus says.

**Luke 14:26** “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

What He means by “hate” is a decision of loyalty. If you haven’t already chosen that your loyalty is going to be first and foremost with the LORD God, you can’t be my disciple. Over any other loyalty and any other influence, regardless of how that tugs on our heart strings, this is where we stand. Joshua says, “Choose today. Choose to worship the LORD.” Be deliberate. Be intentional. The LORD is good. You will never ever be disappointed. You will never ever find that the Lord is unfaithful to any promise. He is the Lord of Life. Choose Him!

How did the people respond?

***16*** *Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods,* ***17*** *for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed.* ***18*** *And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”*

Joshua hears their words, but he still presses them hard because he is concerned that they’re just words. He is concerned that they have some kind of intention behind them, but they are not full-hearted commitments. So that’s the reason why he says

***19*** *But Joshua said to the people, “You are not 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.* ***20*** *If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.”*

Joshua says first, it sounds like you’re taking this decision kind of tritely. You say, “We’re going to do this.” He says, “Don’t you realize that you don’t have the power in yourself to serve the LORD? You actually need God’s grace in order to be worshipers, in order to serve Him.” We need God’s grace to supply our hearts with what we need daily to be able to make these choices, these decisions that move us toward worship.

Let us never think that our own choices or our own willpower keep us in Him. Let us never think that it’s our determination that brings about our perseverance. It’s always a humble cry for God to bring grace, and He has these means of grace. It’s the community of faith. It’s the Word. It’s prayer. It’s the Lord’s Supper. It’s these means that God brings us to bring grace to strengthen us. It seems to Joshua like they’re being rather flippant about this. They say, “Oh, yeah, we’re going to serve the Lord. Don’t worry about it, Joshua. You’re an old guy.” I think Paul has this same idea behind him when he writes in Philippians

**Philippians 4:13** I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

***22*** *Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.”* ***23*** *He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel.”*

He keeps pressing them for a decision. He wants to be a fork in the road. His last words are not meant to just be road signs saying, “This direction toward God.” He says, “I’m going to stand here in front of you and when you meet me, you’re going to have to turn to the left or turn to the right. You either turn away from God or you turn toward Him. But I’m not just going to simply be a sign before you.” I think that’s where we as believers have to be for one another. We have to be forks in the road with each other because it is strengthening to our faith to make decision after decision after decision to follow the Lord. It’s not enough to say, “I would encourage you to put away those gods that I think are a part of your life and follow the Lord.” No, I’m going to stand here and in this conversation I’m going to ask you, “Will you make a decision now?” That is such a strengthening thing to the family of God, for us to have that role in one another’s lives. Satan loves to use spiritual indecision, spiritual delay to keep our heart divided. The bottom line, Joshua says is choose. Choose to give God credit. Choose to put away these false gods. That requires intentionality and a depth of commitment, a strength that God Himself provides. Choose to serve. That word “serve” is worship, submit to, obey, do the will of. Serve the Lord!

I have two closing comments. First, to those who have never committed your life to Jesus as Savior and Lord, the Gospel of God is such a beautiful, wonderful message. It finds us in our dark neediness. Without God, we are in our sins and we are cut off from Him. We’re trying to find as much life as we possibly can in a world that is broken, a world that is passing away. God enters and says the problem is we’re not connected to the Source of Life. So all the solutions that we find, even if we would gain the whole world, even if we gain everything the world promises, which not very many people have that experience, but even if that were true, even if that’s our experience and we gain everything these false gods promise, we gain it all, but you lose your soul, what has just happened? That’s a decision you have to make.

What is going to happen when I die? All of us die. God offers us life now. It’s abundant life. And He offers us life forever. This world offers a kind of abundant life which in itself is empty. Almost every biography and testimony of people who have gained the whole world would raise their hand and say, “It’s not enough. I thought there would be something more about this.” So those false gods fail in this world and they fail in unbelievable ways in the life to come. The true God always succeeds. He sent His own Son. He loves you to such a point that He sent His own Son to die upon a cross so that you could have forgiveness of sins and a relationship with God. I want to ask you: Would you choose today? I’m not asking you to go home to choose. I’m asking you to choose right now. For all you know about yourself and your need, for all you know about Jesus Christ, if you’ve never chosen, would you choose right now to say, “God, I need Jesus to be my Savior and my Lord”? Choose this day!

Just yesterday, I’ll tell you as a church family, it was very sweet. Some of the leaders of our church met with Grace Baptist Church. Pastor Claude White was here and we really desire to see a growing relationship between Grace Baptist Church and Bethany. It was our first time to meet. It was such a beautiful time together. One of the things that the pastor and the deacons of Grace Baptist said was, “We want to grow in this relationship to the point where if any member of our church hears about Bethany—Bethany is doing this, or a member of Bethany—that their heart would ring out, ‘That’s my sister church. We are together.’” Isn’t that a great vision? We just rejoiced because that’s been our vision. That’s what we wanted, but to hear them say it was really awesome! So we took some time and we just talked; Grace Baptist and Bethany Baptist leaders. We just took some time to tell some testimonies. Where did we start with the Lord? How did we get to be spiritual leaders in a church? They’re all fantastic! I bring us to this point of decision. Every person that had a story, and I think this is true of every believer, if we took time. Every believer has a time of decision. That’s not to say you all know the exact date or the hour. Most people don’t. But they know that there is a time, a season in their life where things changed, where they gave themselves to Christ.

One guy said, “Here’s my story. I started off making terrible decisions as a young man.” He said, “I got shot in the head. A week later, I saw the guy that shot me in the head. I was getting out of the car to go kill him, when my dad said, ‘Don’t get out of the car, son. That’s not the way to go.’ I listened to my dad, but I still had that hatred in my heart.” He said, “Then jump forward and my dad told me the Gospel. He told me, ‘You need Jesus.’ But I didn’t listen to him. I didn’t make a decision that day.” Then he said, “So then later, I had a massive heart attack.” He is a pretty young guy, and he had a huge heart attack. “Again, I thought about Jesus, but didn’t make a decision for Him. Then a couple years later, I had to have triple heart bypass surgery. Then I thought, ‘Okay, Lord. You have my attention.’” (Laughter!) He said, “It took me three things.” He said, “How do you get shot in the head and still live through it? How do you have a massive heart attack and live through it? How do you have this heart surgery?” He said, “I realized I needed to give myself,” and he committed his way to the Lord. Now he’s serving vibrantly. You see the joy on his face. I say that to just encourage you that God often brings us to a point of decision. Today I pray would be that day.

To those who have committed your life to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, I urge you to every morning, choose to serve the Lord. Joshua, as he is talking about “me and my house, we will choose the LORD,” he uses a tense that is not “we chose the LORD.” He uses a tense that “we will choose the LORD” to say, “we are choosing the LORD now. Tomorrow we’ll choose the LORD. The next day we’ll choose the LORD, and on to the last day until we die. That’s our commitment. Every day, we’re making a new choice.” This is the character of the decision of a follower of Jesus.

It’s not enough when we tell our testimony to say, “Well 20 years ago, I chose to serve the LORD.” That’s where it might have begun, but what a follower of Jesus says is, “Then 19 years ago, and 18 years ago, and here’s what happened last week and here’s what happened yesterday and here’s what is happening today. I am choosing to serve the Lord.” That’s the testimony of a follower of Jesus. So I’m going to ask y’all to make a choice. Will you choose this day? I’m going to put away other gods. I’m going to start giving God credit again and I am going to serve and worship Him wholly. To the glory of God, to the good of our future, to the strength of our witness let us say together, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”