

Obedience

CSI: Joshua

Joshua 24:14-27

August 29, 2010

Focus: Do we choose God and are we obedient? What do we need to give up? – When we choose to follow God, we also must give up something. Obedience comes at a cost.



I love variety. When I go to dinner at a new restaurant, you can be assured that I'm going to choose the sampler combo. Then I can try all the different options and have my choice of the favorite. I like choice. It was so difficult for me to choose my home, that I drug my poor realtor to over 79 different homes until we eventually settled on our house.



Modern day America is full of choice isn't it? That's part of our heritage. We didn't want a king thrust upon us without having our say. And then we wanted choice in a president. And that American freedom and choice has trickled down today. You can go to Burger King and have it your way! We can choose everything from an early age.



And for postmoderns, those born after 1964, Generation X, Y (Millennials) and now even Generation Z, they don't like to choose one thing or the other. Just like I like variety and combo plates, it's the both/and mentality. Why should we choose just one thing? Why have a phone that is just a phone and why bother with a computer if it doesn't have a camera to talk to your friends and a blue ray

disk player too.

Today our scripture is about choice as well. This is the last Sunday in our CSI: Joshua series. We've investigated a Character Study In: Joshua. And we've learned about the character traits that God worked in Joshua and wants to work in our lives. And this morning we come to the character trait of Obedience...Choosing God.

This is the final chapter of Joshua. The people have finally reached the Promised Land after 40 years, they've crossed the Jordan River, conquered the enemies living in the land, divided up the land to each family and now they are about to start their new lives. Joshua is about to die and has one last conversation with the Children of Israel. [Read Joshua 24:14-28]



¹⁴ *"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."*

¹⁶ *Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!" ¹⁷ It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the*

nations through which we traveled. ¹⁸ And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God."

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

²¹ But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD."

²² Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD."

"Yes, we are witnesses," they replied.

²³ "Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him."

²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. ²⁶ And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.

²⁷ "See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."

²⁸ Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance.

In this passage, Joshua isn't just asking the children of Israel, but he is demanding they make a choice. There is no both/and in Joshua's equation. From this moment on, the Children of Israel must choose who they follow. Joshua starts out by reminding the people of who God is and has been in their lives and then asks them to serve the Lord.

It's interesting; as you read the bible you don't get much choice. Humans aren't given much choice; it is often God doing the choosing. God chose the children of Israel. God chose the place for the sanctuary/temple of God. God chose Jerusalem and Aaron and a line of priests. Moses asks why me and God says that He has chosen Moses. And the same with Joshua.

In fact, when humans are given a choice in the Old Testament, it's a very big deal. Lot had the choice between what we know as the Promised Land or the land between the Nile, the other would go to Abraham. Lot chose not the Promised land, but the land with Sodom and Gomorrah. And then God had to give Lot another choice and his wife looked back and turned to salt. And so here, just as the people are about to finally receive their inheritance they are given a choice – and that choice is Obedience to God. Joshua says,

"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:14-15 TNIV)

Joshua reminds these people of who God has been in their lives. He takes them not just to Egypt, but all the way back to their ancestor Abraham 'beyond the Euphrates'. Joshua is being clear that God had chosen them a long long time ago. Long before they could ever imagine, God chose them and saved them from slavery in Egypt and then Joshua asks them, Who will you follow? Who will you obey?

Obedience: CHOOSING GOD.

These children of Israel have seen everything. By taking them back to their ancestor Abraham, Joshua is reminding them that they had a different life at one point. And he's also reminding them that their great grandfather chose God as well. Joshua is reminding them and us that God gives us a choice. Joshua says,

“then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...” They don’t need to be obedient to God, but Joshua reminds them of all that God has done and then leaves it up to the people, ‘choose for yourselves.’

But Joshua is very clear. He knows that when we choose God and when we serve God, it comes at a bit of a cost. No longer can the children of Israel pick and choose in their worship. They can’t build golden cows, they can’t have idols sitting on their mantle and they can’t have other objects and things in their lives that take the place of the Lord their God. Joshua says, ***“Then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living.”*** (Joshua 24:15 TNIV)

Joshua says look, you’ve been exposed to allot. You know you could go back to your old ways and follow those other gods. You’re also living in a land with tons of idols. Who are you going to follow this day? And Joshua is clear, if you choose God, then you have to put away your idols and mini-gods, for there is only the One True God. He says this more than once in this passage. Not only does he start out telling the people this, but he finishes his speech with this reminder in vs. 23 as well. ***“Now then, throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.”*** (Joshua 24:23 TNIV)

I love that, Joshua lays it down choose, throw away your old idols and I love this wording, ‘yield your hearts to the Lord.’ Don’t just speak it, don’t just nod your heads and say great, but give your heart fully over to God.

Obedience: PUTTING AWAY OTHER GODS.

This is a word for us here this morning. Now we may not have little stone idols sitting all over our house and we certainly haven’t pulled our gold together to build a big old cow, but there are still idols in our lives that we yield our hearts to instead of God. *(I have some Jewish background on conversion and then the aversion to worldly if want)*

What are your idols this morning? Is it the idol of climbing the social ladder or the professional work ladder? Do you worship at the altar of your desk at work? Do you worship at the altar of being the perfect mother or father? Having the picture perfect family and hide the messiness of life? Do you worship at the altar of TV or your computer? Or maybe your Xbox 360? What fills your time instead of serving the Lord your God?

Once the people choose God and put away their other gods, their idols that get in the way, the Joshua says it’s up to you, ***“But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”***

It’s very interesting in this scripture; Joshua says over and over again, that they all must ‘serve’ the Lord. I believe every word used in the scripture is critical and sends us a message. God only has so many words (hold up bible) and each one gives us insight into God’s desires for our lives. 9 times in just those few short verses I read and 14 times total in the entire chapter of Joshua 24, the word ‘serve’ the Lord is used. To serve God dominates this passage. Now it’s interesting, because this word has two theological meanings in the ancient Hebrew.

One is to be ‘devoted to’ in sincerity or in faithfulness. Joshua is saying to the people and us, that when we choose God, to serve God means that we are completely devoted to God. With our whole being.

And then the other meaning comes from the root of the word to serve. In Hebrew it comes from the word slave or servant. Joshua is saying that when you choose to follow God, you serve God completely with everything that you are and you are now a slave/servant of God. (Interpretation Commentary p. 124)

This meaning was really important for the children of Israel, because remember they were on the edge of what they thought of as freedom. They had been slaves for hundreds of years in Egypt. Then they spend 40

years wandering around together and had no freedom and now finally they are at the Promised Land, they are about to have their own land and go about their own business and Joshua brings them all back together and reminds them that huh huh, their freedom comes from service to God.

And the same is true for us today. Sure, we are completely free, we could go out and do all sorts of ‘fun’ things and live it up and do whatever, but is that the best thing for us. Or rather this scripture is reminding us that when we choose God our blessings and our happiness come by living as God desires – by serving God.

Obedience: SERVING GOD.

We’ve spent a great summer investigating God’s character traits in Joshua. We’ve walked with people to the shores of the Jordan River, taken a step in faithfulness into those waters, struggled with being humble and having the integrity and being trustworthy even when no one is looking and tried so hard to call on God and be patient. And now, we come to the end of our series and God’s message doesn’t change.

Three times in this passage Joshua asks the people if they will choose God. He asks three times, because he knows being obedient to God isn’t easy. And that when we say yes, we need to be sure. And so he challenges those Israelites and us ... will we choose to be obedient? Will we follow and serve only the Lord our God?

Several weeks ago, when we stood on the River Jordan and God parted the waters, stones were set up as a reminder of our faith and commitment. And now again, Joshua says at the end of this passage.

²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. ²⁶ And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD. ²⁷ "See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God." (Joshua 24:25-27 TNIV)

All of Israel chose God that day with Joshua. They had walked with him for a long time. They knew his characteristics: Courage, Faithfulness, Leadership, Persistence, Trustworthiness, Humility, and Patience.

Now, I want to invite you back up to God’s holy place to take that stone with you as a constant reminder of your choice to follow and be obedient. Will you choose God today?

Benediction/Closing

As you go this week. As you carry your stone as a remembrance of your commitment, there are three questions that we couldn’t answer for you in your teaching notes. Take those questions and spend time with God. How are you choosing God? How/Where are you serving God? (you’ll see a list of opportunities here at the church for your to serve.) And what do you need to put away?

- 1. How are you choosing God?**
- 2. What are the other gods in your life that you need to put away?**
- 3. How/Where are you serving God?**