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December 12, 2018:

“You Have a Choice: What God Will You Serve?”

I Prayer

II Recap and Overview

December is naturally a time of reflection. Moreover, from the perspective of people of faith, this time of year causes us to reflect both practically and theologically. From a practical perspective, as we approach the end of the calendar year, it's natural to look back and consider all God has done in our lives. Moreover, from a theological perspective, as we prepare to begin a new calendar year (we just began a new liturgical year with Advent), we must also think about the trust we place in God for our future. Just as such a two-fold perspective exists for us, in anticipation of closing out a calendar year, the same two-fold perspective exists for Joshua, as he prepares to close out his life.

After twenty-two chapters, we're now completing the book of Joshua, with this evening's analysis of chapters 23 and 24. Before doing so, however, let's briefly recap the organization of this first book after Moses that we've spent so much time covering. Chapters 1 through 5, preparations for the attack, occur immediately after Moses's death and after God commissions Joshua to lead God's chosen people into the Promised Land. Chapters 6 through 12 detail the battles the Israelites fought, as God gave them the Promised Land, and Chapters 13 through 21 detail Joshua's apportionment of the Promised Land, to the respective tribes, after God gave them victory in battle. Finally, in chapters 23 and 24, Joshua has a national assembly with the people, as he prepares to go the way of Moses.

Chapter 23, comprised of only 16-verses, can be divided into two parts, verses 1-10 and 11-16. As Joshua uses the same type of rhetorical style (addressing the people as God's spokesperson) as he did in chapter 1, the first part of his chapter 23 speech is backward-looking. Verses 1-10 remind the people (us) of all God has done and how God has been true to God's word. Isn't it natural to take inventory when we get to the end of something (*e.g.*, vacation, book, relationship)? The second part of his speech (verses 11-16), however, is forward-looking. Joshua is clear, in verse 14, that his time is drawing to a close. He therefore gives a stern warning: if you don't follow God in going forward, after all God has done for you, you won't receive God's protection, as you have in the past. How does that make you feel as we approach January 1? Most people make New Year's resolutions that have to do with getting closer to God, instead of moving away, right? Joshua also warns about intermarriage and impliedly references Deuteronomy 7:3-4, cautioning against the worshiping of “other” gods!

In chapter 24, we return to Shechem, a place where Joshua previously led Israel in renewing its covenant with God (chapter 8:30-35), so they can again renew their covenant. After again recounting God's goodness, the chapter reaches an apex in verses 15-17, with the popular directive that Joshua gives the people: "choose who you will serve; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." After further cautioning by Joshua, when the people commit to serving God, Joshua erects a physical monument (v. 26) to remind everyone of their commitment to follow God, rejecting other "gods." Finally, as the book concludes, Joshua dies and is buried in the land he took in the hill country of Ephraim, after all the tribes received their allotments.

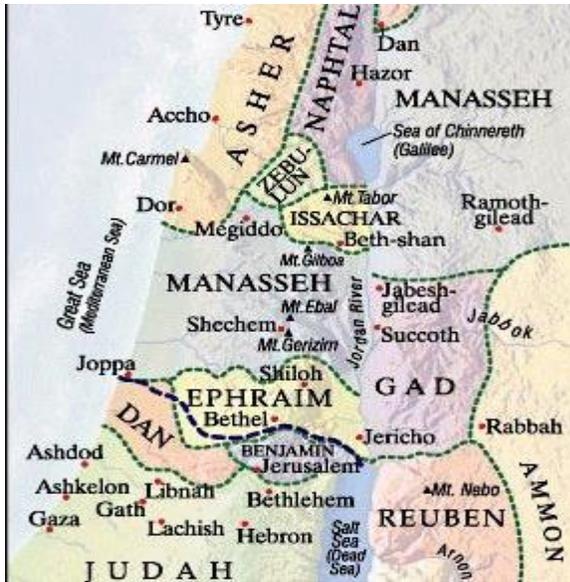
III Reflective Matters for Consideration

- Why do you think God was so much against "intermarriage" at that time? Do you think God's admonition was similar to *Loving v. Virginia* (interracial marriage) or that it had to do more with interreligious marriage? Do we have similar issues today and how do couples get past those issues?
- Much like Joshua, who is reflecting at the end of his life, we can also reflect at the end of the year. Has following God "protected you," as it did the Israelites? Has God kept God's promises to you, as God did with the Israelites? In going forward to 2019, has God been good enough to you where you feel as though you should do more to draw closer to God?
- Are there any other "gods" in our society? Do we have any constant reminders of our promise to follow God? Are we also faithful or are we sometimes influenced by other "gods?"

IV Textual Examination (reading select portions of Joshua 23 and 24)

- In looking at 23:1-3 & 14, how would you describe Joshua's sentiment? If you were there, at the assembly, with Joshua, how would you receive the message he's attempting to share?
- 23:12-14 and 16-18 are a warning against intermarriage and an admonition to follow the covenant of Moses, as referenced in 23:6 (please pull Deuteronomy 7:3-4). Is this intermarriage a reference to interracial marriage (*Loving v. Virginia*)? What do you take it to be? Why do you think God was so stern about this? What's different now and how do couples work through such differences in our day-and-age?

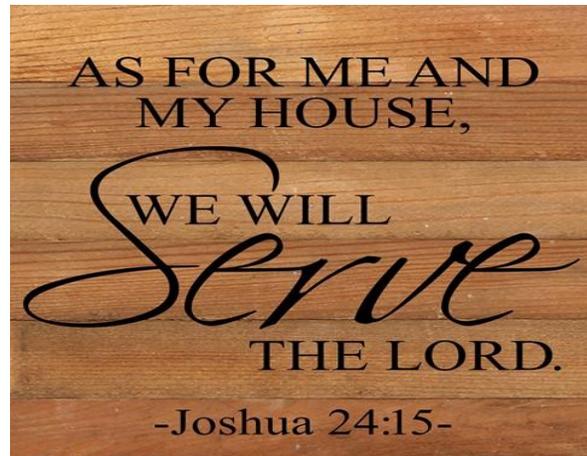




- In 24:1-28, Joshua is leading the people in another covenant ceremony. He’s getting close to the end of his life and he knows it! Would your sentiment be similar with your children or grandchildren, if you were approaching the end of your life?

- In 24:15, Joshua hits the high point of the chapter. Have you made a decision, on behalf of your family, to reject other “gods” and follow the Lord? Assuming so, what other “gods” are out there, vying for you and/or your family?

- In 24:25-26, Joshua makes a physical reminder of the people’s pronounced choice to follow God. Do we have any similar physical and frequently seen reminders in our society? Assuming so, how are they given meaning and how can their meaning be diluted?



- As we approach 2019, in considering what God has done in your past, what choices will you make for your future?

V Follow-up Questions

VI Closing Prayer