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JOSHUA 24:1-33

April 16, 2000

Today's lesson ends for us our study of the book of *Joshua*. We saw last week that Joshua exhorted the children of Israel to finish the task God had called them to.

Joshua reminded them that as long as they
remained faithful to only Jehovah...
and **worshiped** only Jehovah...
and **clung to** only Jehovah...that Jehovah would fight for them...

But, Joshua also told them that if they went after the gods of the heathen nations, then Jehovah

would make these nations **a snare and a trap...**
and a whip in their sides...
and thorns in their eyes...

He told them the anger of the Lord would burn against them and that they would perish from off the good land God had given to them.

Joshua was old. He knew his time on this earth was about over, and his heart was heavy with the fact that soon these folks would have to continue without his leadership and his courage. (Have you thought about the fact that there was no replacement named for Joshua? Joshua replaced Moses as the leader of Israel...but after no one was named to replace Joshua. I believe we're going to see why in the first chapter of the book of Judges.) **And it's as though after Joshua's exhortation in *chapter 23*, Joshua feels compelled in *chapter 24* to make sure the folks understand the gravity of the matter.**

So Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem...**a place that had historically been a place of commitment for the children of Israel.**

It was at Shechem that God had promised Abram that his descendants would inherit the land (Gen. 12:6-7) and **Abram had built an altar there.**

And remember when Jacob decided to return to his homeland after having served his Uncle Laban so many years...remember how on his way back he had wrestled with the angel of the LORD and remember how when Esau came out to meet him with all his entourage, Jacob didn't know if his brother had come out to kill him or not? Well, it was after all this that **Jacob settled in Shechem and built an altar there.**

Well, Joshua knew these people well. **He knew they were prone to wander.** What does the old hymn say?

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it...Prone to leave the God I love..."

So, Joshua calls the people to Shechem...a place that had been important to his forefathers, and he began to rehearse for them a Reader's Digest, condensed, abridged version of the their history.

(I know Mary did such a great job with last week's lesson and she encouraged you to do this, didn't she? She encouraged you to list the ways that God had shown Himself faithful to you...)

You know, sometimes you and I **must** go back to our Shechem...we must go back to the place of commitment and

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we must build an altar there and ask God to bring before us anew and afresh His promises to us and our commitment to Him...and more importantly, just as Mary suggested to you last week, we need to **recall** and **recount** what He has done for us...We need to remember...

And let me just say this before we get to the first point of our lesson...if there is a heritage of a Shechem in your life as there was in the lives of the children of Israel...if you can look back on a Godly heritage in your family...Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! But, if you can't...then begin this Godly heritage for your own children and grandchildren!

1) A Call to Remembrance

Verses 1-13...(and notice all the things God is reminding the people that He had done)

Let me ask you...have you ever done what Joshua just did? Have you ever allowed God to list for you the things He has done for you? Have you ever sat down and made a list of the ways God has blessed you...

the **answered prayers**, the **protection**, the **guidance**,
the **health**, the **comforts**, the **peace**, the **love**, the **mercy**,
the **grace**, the **forgiveness** and we could go on and on
and on...

Is there a place of remembrance for you?

I'm convinced that we don't have even a **vague** understanding of all that God has done for us. I believe that many, many times we've been protected and guided by the strong and unseen hand of Almighty God and we didn't even know it!! We believe we were just extremely careful at that dangerous intersection...or on that on ramp or off ramp, don't we? Many times we take the credit for something God has done for us...And we don't have a clue how often God has intervened and shown Himself mighty for us...but the question is DO WE CONSISTENTLY THANK HIM FOR THOSE THINGS WE **ARE** AWARE OF?

There's a child's prayer that says,
"God is great, God is good..."

And He is!! He was great and good to show Himself so mighty on the behalf of the children of Israel and Joshua confronted them with this and forced them to recall, to remember the past.

And, you know, all that God did for Israel was done out of a heart of love. God told Moses in Deuteronomy, that He didn't choose them because they were great, but He chose them because He loved them...

And may I say to you that you didn't choose God...He chose you! You didn't choose Jesus, Jesus chose you! And He did it not because you were **pretty or talented, or gifted or deserving or wonderful**...He did it because He loved you!!

Not only did Joshua call the people to remembrance, but there was

2) A Call to Decision

Verses 14...

There are three very simple things we need to see in **verse 14...**

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a) an attitude to possess... “Fear the LORD...”

We live in a world that has no fear of the Lord...

There’s no fear of God in our world today...

There’s no fear of God in our country today...

There’s no fear of God in our government today...

And there’s no fear of God even in some of our churches today...

What does it mean to fear the Lord? The word fear means “reverence...a reverential awe...a reverential respect...”

Among other things, to fear the Lord means to acknowledge God’s **love and mercy and grace and peace and compassion and faithfulness and longsuffering** and all those attributes of His character that give us a warm and fuzzy feeling...those attributes of His character that we can almost reach out and touch and clutch to our hearts...

But, to fear the Lord also means that we acknowledge His **righteousness** and His **justice** and His **judgment** and His **wrath** and His **sovereignty** and His **omniscience** and His **omnipotence** and His **omnipresence** and **transcendancy** and His **holiness** and His **majesty**. These attributes that are beyond our comprehension...that seem so far above us...

And fear of the Lord means that **because** we acknowledge all these characteristics...we also **want** to obey Him and we **want** to please Him.

So, our attitude should be one of reverence and awe of God and all that He is...but we also see in **verse 14...**

b) an activity to perform... “serve the Lord in sincerity and truth...”

My attitude toward God is to be an attitude of fear and reverence, and my activity for God should be one of service...

You and I do not serve the Lord in order to **be** saved. We serve the Lord because we **have been** saved!

What does Paul tell us in **Ephesians 2?**

We’re all familiar with **Ephesians 2:8-9...**

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; Not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”

But, what does **verse 10** say?

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**”

We were created in Christ Jesus for good works!!! That means we don’t serve God to rack up Brownie points...we don’t serve God to make Him love us more...**We serve God because He has ordained us to serve Him!!**

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There's an attitude to possess and there's an activity to perform, but also we see in **verse 14...**

c) an affection to put away... "put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt..."

Well, this doesn't apply to you and me, does it? I mean, we don't have any wooden or stone statues that we bow down to, do we? We certainly don't have any false gods in **our** lives, do we?

Let me tell you how we can test ourselves and not only see IF we have false gods in our lives, but also this test will let us know what or who they are.

Two questions:

- 1) How do we spend our time?
- 2) How do we spend our money?

Look at your calendar and look at your checkbook!

With the answers to these two questions, we'll know if there are false gods in our lives. If there are...if we spend more money on the things of the world than on the things of God...if we spend more of our time on the things of the world than on the things of God...I want to tell you, Beloved, we need to put away our false gods.

And may I say to you that your gods may be good...they may be you **husband**, or your **children**, or your **grandchildren**, or your **jobs** or your **hobbies**...but if they come between you and God...if they come BEFORE God...they are idols...they are false gods in your life and they need to be put in their right position!

What God is saying is

"In light of what I've done for you in the past...and in light of what I'm doing for you now, and in light of what I'm going to do for you..."

In light of all that, then **all I ask of you is that you have**
an attitude of reverence and an activity of service
and that you put away those affections for other
things that would come between you and Me."

That's what He asked of them, and that's also what He asks of you and me...

Well, we've seen Joshua call the people to remembrance, and to decision...but now we see

3) A Call to Choose

Verse 15...Joshua forces these folks to make a choice...and may I say to you...we must make a choice every day we live?

"Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve...as for me and my house we will serve the Lord..."

I have this in crosstitch in my kitchen and I have this on a plaque nailed to the back door of our house...

But God isn't impressed that it's on my kitchen wall or on my back door...
**what pleases God is when my everyday life is lived by
this truth...**whether folks can see me or not...whether
I'm at church or at home or wherever...

Verses 16-27...

As we said before...Joshua knew these people so well, didn't he?

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Do you see how he forced them to make this commitment seriously? He doesn't want them to be like their fathers who told Moses, "Oh, yes...we'll do it all..." and then, they proceeded to be so rebellious and they murmured and complained and refused to believe God and wound up spending 40 years in the wilderness...

Joshua wanted them to make their choice for God and really mean it!!

I believe we make commitments to God extremely flippantly today...We make surface commitments!!

When a person walks the aisle of our church, he doesn't just sit down and fill out a card...he's taken back to a room where a counselor shares his or her personal testimony so the person feels free to share their own salvation testimony.

When Bill counsels, he does much what Joshua did in **verse 22**. He says something like this, "Now, I'm signing my name to this card that all you have told me is true. I'm a witness and the Holy Spirit is a witness. So if there's any doubt about your salvation, now is the time to get it settled."

Why does he do that? Because he doesn't want folks to make a surface commitment. The purpose of the counseling is to find out if the commitment is real!! What better opportunity are we ever going to have to help folks get their decision to follow Jesus Christ nailed down?

This pretty much brings us to the end of the book of **Joshua** and also to the end of the life of Joshua.

Joshua was a leader...and I was thinking this week as I prepared this lesson...are leaders born or are leaders made? Well, probably a little of both. God gives men and women the propensity...the abilities and gifts they need to be leaders and then He develops these abilities and gifts in the "school of life."

Let's just recap some leadership characteristics of Joshua.

1) Joshua walked with God...

Joshua meditated daily on the Law of the Lord. (1:8)

Joshua did what it said. (11:15)

Joshua was a man of prayer. (7:6-9)

2) Joshua had courage...

We think of General Joshua bravely leading his folks into battle, don't we? General Omar Bradley defined bravery as "the capacity to perform properly even when scared half to death."

But, you know, sometimes it takes more courage to face your own people at home than to face the enemy on the battlefield, doesn't it?

Joshua had the courage to deal with sin in the camp of Israel.

Joshua had the courage to tell his people to get the job done.

Joshua had the courage to call for a real commitment from them, instead of just a surface commitment.

3) Joshua had a plan and followed it...

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The conquest of Canaan wasn't a haphazard affair. I've watched enough war documentaries with Bill to know that strategy is very important when it comes to war. First, Joshua cut straight across the land and isolated the north from the south. He divided in order to conquer. He conquered the cities in the south and then he conquered the northern cities.

4) Joshua learned from his mistakes...

Joshua was not perfect...he made mistakes...but he didn't quit when he made a mistake. When he was defeated at Ai, he admitted failure, sought the Lord, dealt with the sin in the camp and went back and destroyed Ai.

When he foolishly made a covenant with the Gibeonites, he admitted his mistake, put it to work for him, and honored the covenant as God's people should.

5) Joshua was concerned about the future...

Joshua wanted Israel's future to be secure. Over and over he told the people the consequences they would face if they did not obey the Lord.

6) Joshua glorified God...

Joshua consistently gave God the glory for the successes in the land of Canaan. He glorified God by his obedience...six times the book of **Joshua** tells us that Joshua did what God had called him to do.

Let me just conclude with a challenge today. **Next Sunday is Easter Sunday.** I challenge you this week to go back to your Shechem. Go back in your mind to the place where you made a firm and real and lasting commitment to God...build a spiritual altar there.

Remember all God has done for you.

Acknowledge all God is doing for you now.

Remind yourself of all God has promised you in the future.

And then consider this...

All of this is possible for you and me because of that first Easter Sunday...because of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Maybe you don't have a Shechem. Maybe you've never really been to Calvary. Maybe you've never really had a time when you gave your heart to Jesus Christ. Before there can be a meaningful Shechem in your life, there must first be a Calvary in your life.

Well, there will never be a better day like today to do that!! Today, right here at our Church can be your Calvary!