

Rev Calum Smith - Joshua 24

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 January 2018

Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn back then to a reading in Joshua chapter 24. Joshua chapter 24 will read again at verse 14.

Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers serve beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your father 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.

I am sure this is a very familiar text to you all and I'm sure it's a text you've often seen in houses, maybe your own house or the houses of others is a very popular verse and especially hanging in a home. What wouldn't you desire for a home but to say as for me and my household or my house we will serve the Lord. But what kind of context are these words spoken? There's obviously a choice to be made here but what kind of choice is it?

And maybe as you read this passage you maybe think the choice is obvious but is it so obvious? You know there are things that change over time. Time is moving on always and we are often seeing changes in the reality that we know only too well. But there are some things that don't change and the Bible makes that clear for us. It reminds us that we are always changing but the word of God never changes. The word of God gives us hope among everything else that changes. Christmas time has just passed us by once more and there's something that happens every Christmas and it affects people in different ways. Some people look forward to this thing happening, others aren't too bothered about it taking place and maybe show no interest in it and what is that thing? Every Christmas day we have the Queen's speech.

The Queen's speech. There was a time when I had no interest in it and Selden would sit down to watch the Queen's speech. I didn't really particularly want to hear what she had to say but now I make a point of listening to it. It's not very long, it's very succinct, very clear. She speaks so graciously, she has a passion for her nation that she has queened over, her people that she has queened over and she shows that. But what often comes through in her speeches her desire for Christ to be heard in the midst of everything else that's going on. And she made a point in this year's speech about how things change. This year's speech marked 60 years since her first live television broadcast of her speech and she made such a gracious reference to how she has evolved herself, she has changed herself and technology has changed. So now you don't have to sit down at three o'clock on Christmas

[3 : 4 9] Day to watch it. You can catch up with the speech at any point, watch it as you're outside on your laptop or your tablet. There's various ways. But in all these things she is saying that has changed, she made reference to Christ in the midst of it all. And her address to the nation makes us consider that. And as we turn to Joshua here, he is almost doing the same as the Queen does and addressed to the nation. And here Joshua is addressing the nation. He is giving them a speech, but no ordinary speech. It is what he wants them to hear and what of God and what God has to say to them. And this is a speech just before his passing as you see at the end of chapter 24. It moves into Joshua's death and burial.

And he has seen many changes throughout his years. He has seen a nation being taken from slavery and bondage through the wilderness into the promised land. He's seen them come into the promised land and see all the idols that are surrounding them for a time they were faithful to God. But now he is seeing there is change again. The people are going back to their former ways to worshiping idols and false gods. And what he desires above everything else is that they will come back to God and serve God. Here is his address to the nation. Some people will listen and others won't. Just like the Queen's address, some people are interested, some people aren't. But maybe today you are thinking to yourself there was a time when really I had no interest in what God had to say to me. There was a time when I didn't want to hear what God was saying through his word. But now there is an interest. Now perhaps God is at work. The Spirit of God is awakening you and all of a sudden you're thinking what is God saying? What does the Word of God mean? What is it showing to me? What is it asking of me? Because every time we hear the Word of God we are challenged by it. And the challenge here in Joshua's day and in our own day is who are you serving? And what does he mean by that? He means by that who is your master? What is the most important thing in your life? What are you living for? What are you serving?

In the midst of this he is realising that the people that he was ministering to, they were beginning to have a master over them who was not God. Other gods in the nation.

Other ways of doing things. And he was saying to them look you are departing from God. He's no longer your true master. And if you continue down this path, well in the whole covenant setting you are being reminded that God is a God of covenant. He has promised blessing on you. But if you turn away from him there is a curse. There is a consequence. And so he says choose this day who you are going to serve. Who is your master? Joshua has words here in verse 15 are like a summary to us. In all that is changing. And in all the changes that we see, God never changes. He makes demands of us. He asks us are you listening? He asks us what do you see in the way ahead for yourself? Who are you trusting? Who are you believing?

So what does our God, our King have to say to us today? As he addresses us as his people. What is he saying to us through his word? Well there are three things in this passage I want us to see. Three things. The first thing is God is saying to consider. Consider for yourself what is going on in the world and in your own life. Consider for yourself first of all what you have heard and what you have seen. And you see that in verse 1 to 13. Joshua gathers the tribes of Israel together. The elders, the heads, the judges, the officers and they present themselves before God. They come before God. What they are doing is saying what does God have to say to us? And in verse 2 it says Joshua said to all the people thus says the Lord the God of Israel. Long ago your fathers lived beyond the Ephraites. And then he goes in right down throughout this section to give a summary of all that has taken place over the past number of years. He gives them a summary of everything that

[9:18] God has done for them. How he has led them from Egypt and even going back before that how he was faithful to the people, to Abraham and his promise through Abraham and everything that has happened since. And how they ended up in Egypt in slavery and how he brought them out of slavery. How he led them through the wilderness. How he brought them into the promised land and he's saying to them, consider for yourself everything that God has done.

Look he's saying, it's not of yourselves that you have done this. It's not of your own strength. It's not of your own power or might or anything. It is of God. It is God who has brought you through all of these things. He has been with you. Consider these things for yourself. He is saying the Psalmist and Psalm 116 says, rest, O my soul, God has been good to you.

God has been good to you. And we can look back. I'm sure we can all look back and realize that have been times that have been hard times that have been good. But in the midst of it all, can we ever say, well, God was bad to me. God treated me unfairly. God treated me in a way I didn't deserve. Can we say that of God? Surely God is a God of goodness.

But even in the midst of difficult, decent challenges, we can still say God is faith. God is just. God is right. God is to be praised. And so he is saying to the people and saying to ourselves, consider these things. Look at these things. What is it saying to you?

Well, consider the goodness of God. Consider how good God has been to you. Can you not see how God has been faithful in the past? So often it's as we look back. Maybe at the time we doubted that even God was anywhere near us. But as we look back, we see he was there.

[11 : 43] He was there with me all the time and I didn't even recognize it. But he is faithful. So Joshua is saying to the people, consider the past. But he also says more than that. He says, consider the present and consider what not just what God has done, but what God wants to do with you. And he is saying, consider now what it means to serve God. Because there is a cost in serving God. You see, serving God, having God as Lord over your life doesn't mean life is easy. He says there are things that you have to do. There are things you maybe have to change. And you see it in the way that Joshua speaks to them in the verses following in verse 19. But Joshua said to the people, this is after a positive response by the people in verse 16, we will serve the Lord their words. But what are they actually saying? And Joshua says to them in verse 19, Joshua said to the people, you are not able to serve the Lord for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God. And he will not forgive your transgression, the transgressions of your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you. It almost seems a strange answer, doesn't it? They have said we will serve the Lord, but he says you cannot serve the Lord because your hearts are not right. You don't understand what it means to follow the Lord. The consequences of doing it wrong are serious. And what he is saying to them is consider what it means for you now. You are trying to serve too many gods. It's more than mere words. There is a cost, he says, to following God. And Jesus says the same things in the New Testament. In Matthew 16, verse 24 and 25, 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. There is a cost to following. And so Joshua is saying to the people, consider this. It's more than mere words. You're talking here about a whole life change. What does it mean? There's the free offer. Choose this day whom you will serve. But there is the cost of then coming to serve. Let me illustrate that for you. If I was to say to you, I have a great desire to climb Mount Everest. I want to go and climb Mount Everest, but I go and look into it and I find it's actually going to cost a huge amount of money. It would cost about £70,000 to £100,000 to climb Mount Everest. So I cannot do it. It's too expensive.

But then someone comes to me, a businessman comes to me and says, I'll pay for you to go and do it. And he's going to pay for everything, the equipment, the training, the travel, the climb. Everything is going to be paid. So it's going to be free. You think to yourself, well, that's great. I can go and do it now. But is it free? It may be paid for, but what am I entering into? I'm entering into something that will take great effort. I've got to train for it. I've got to work hard to try and achieve it. It's going to take a lot of effort to climb to the summit of Mount Everest. And even more than that, it could cost me my very life. Many people try to climb Mount Everest and end up dying doing it. It's free. Everything's paid for. But there's still a cost. And the cost has great consequences. And that is the point that Joshua is making here. He's saying to the people, you're going to consider all of this. Who are you going to serve? We will serve the Lord. It's a natural response. But he says, consider what it means. There is a cost in this. It may even cost you your very life, but it is worth it. And there are things that we have to consider in our own lives, things in the past, things in the present, the cost of what it means to follow Jesus.

But we are being called to follow Him. Consider what it means. The second thing we see here is that Joshua says, make a comparison. Let's compare the choice here, he says. Who are you going to serve? You're going to serve God or the gods of your fathers or the gods of the Amorites? In order to help the people choose, Joshua gives them some advice. But the advice maybe isn't what we might expect. Just look at verse 14. Now therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers serve beyond the river and in deed. I'm served the Lord. So the choice seems obvious.

Put away the false gods and serve the Lord. But look at what he says in verse 15. If it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve. Whether the gods of your fathers served in the region beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. Isn't it a strange choice? It sounds like he's saying you're ruling out God. So this is the choice you're leaving yourself. You're choosing between two. God isn't really in the choice that he's putting before them. He says, right, if it's evil to serve the Lord, choose today who you are going to serve. Are you going to serve the gods of your fathers beyond the region of the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now dwell. The choice seems absurd. And that is what Joshua is doing.

[19:02] He is bringing this choice before them in a way that they will be shocked. What kind of choice is Joshua giving to us? Choose whether to serve the gods of our fathers in Egypt or the gods of the Amorites. What kind of choice is not even giving us the choice of serving the Lord? And that is exactly what Joshua was saying. He's shocking them into considering who it is that they are serving because you cannot serve God and anybody else.

So he's saying immediately, if you're going to choose the gods of your fathers or the Amorites, you're saying we cannot serve God. So we might as well just leave him out of the equation. Serving the Lord seems evil in your eyes, he says. Again, it's a challenge.

Is it really evil in your eyes? But what does he mean by that? He means it's evil because you're almost putting your eggs into one basket. Serving the Lord seems evil because, well, it might rule out other options. So they're saying we are going to serve all the gods.

We'll serve the Lord, but let us serve the gods of our fathers in the past and the gods of the Amorites because just in case, surely we'll be right with one. Surely we'll be covered. It's a bit like your insurance policy. They see serving the Lord as almost being third party. They're not fully covered. But if we serve the Lord and all these other gods will be fully comprehensive, every alternative will be covered. But Joshua is saying you cannot because God is a holy God. God is a jealous God. You cannot, you're not able to serve the Lord if you still have it in your heart to serve other gods too. So there is the choice. If you're not going to serve God, who are you serving? It's almost like you're saying God or your father, the God of where you are just now. These are your alternatives, but you're not truly serving the Lord. And for ourselves, that is always a challenge.

Who are we serving today? The gods of our fathers, the gods of the present day, or are we serving the Lord? Somebody once said, the heart is an idle factory. And it's so true. How often do we have gods, idols that come between us and our worship of God? It's so easy to happen. It can happen and does happen so often in church. Think about what Joshua is saying here. Sometimes we can be guilty of serving the God of our fathers. Of what happened in the past being more important, things that need to be held on to, traditions that come in between us and worshipping God. And there are things that prevent us worshipping God in the right way. Or as he says, the cause of where you are now. And there's always the danger of where we are now becoming what we worship above God. And you think about it, tradition and change is always where there is conflict, conflict that doesn't need to be there. Because we make a God of tradition, we make a God of change. And we can be guilty either way. But if that comes between us and worshipping the true God, we have to ask ourselves, who do we really want to worship? Surely above everything else, we want to worship the Lord.

[23 : 23] We want the Lord as our master. Nothing to come between us and serving Him. I'm sure there is no one here. I hope there is no one here that would say, I want to turn my back on God, because other things are more important. There is nothing more important than serving the Lord. We can learn from the past. We can learn from our traditions. We can learn from our fathers in the same way as Joshua was saying to the people, then you can learn from them, where they went right and where they went wrong. You can learn from the present, the good things that you have around you, but the challenges that there are. We can learn in that way too. But we learn in the midst of not choosing between one or the other, but doing it all for the glory of God. The choice he gave them, when you compare the choice, there is no comparison. He says, do you want to serve the gods of your fathers or the gods of your Amorites? There's nothing compared to the Lord. Nothing. In the same way as we sang in Psalm 115, idols, they can seem so attractive, but they're of no use to us. Only serving the living God makes any difference for us. So the comparison is there for us. Joshua was saying, look, if you're putting God out, if you say it's too evil, this is what you're left with. And the choice is really absurd. There's no comparison to serving God. Then finally we see what Joshua says here, make a commitment. Commit yourselves to the Lord. That's what we see in verse 15. He says, the choice is there before you, but he says the end of the verse, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And isn't that the challenge for ourselves today? We're always being challenged to conform in different ways. We can be in the minority. But Joshua is saying, doesn't matter what anyone else here thinks. Me and my household, we are going to serve the Lord. We are committed to the

Lord. He is our master. He is the one we live for. He is the one in whom we live, move and have our being. Everything good comes from God. We are going to serve him because no other God compares. His commitment is to the Lord because he knows the Lord is committed to him. And God reminds us right throughout his word. I am a God of covenant. I am a God of promise. You see it throughout the Old Testament. God is faithful to his people. Return to me, you so often say, and I will return to you. I will bless you. My desire is for good for you. He says, you are like sheep. You've wandered away. You've turned each to your own way, but come back right throughout the Old Testament. And where do we see it culminate but at the cross? You see sacrifices throughout the Old Testament, all in pointing towards

Christ. And God is saying to us today, look at how good I have been to you. I've done everything for you. I have even given my son, my only son, to lay down his life for you.

God is a God of promise. And right throughout the Scriptures to this very day, he is faithful and always will be. God doesn't change. And God is saying the same thing to us as he said to his people long ago, choose this day whom you will serve. Who do you trust? Who will make a difference in your life? When it comes to the end of your day, when it comes to the day of judgment, how are you going to stand before God? Can you say, God, you failed me?

No. We'll have to say, God, I failed you. But I trust you. Your grace, your mercy will see me home because I believe in you. Are we committed to the Lord? Are we serving the Lord? Is he our master? And what kind of commitment do you have in the business world that an illustration used to show and test what kind of commitment people have to a business plan?

[28 : 44] And in many ways, it can be applied to the Christian walk as well. It seems like a silly story, but it has a good point. And the point is this, are you a chicken or a pig when it comes to commitment? What does that mean? Well, listen to the story. A pig and a chicken were walking down the road. And the chicken says to the pig, pig, how about we open a restaurant? And the pig replies, well, maybe suppose we could do that. Well, we call it.

And the chicken says, well, how about we call it bacon and eggs? And pigs stops to think from and he thinks and says, hold on, he says, I don't like this idea. For you, this is just a contribution. But for me, this is a full commitment. This is a sacrifice. You see the point when it comes to your Christian commitment, are you a pig or a chicken? Are you just making a contribution, a token gesture? Are you like the people in the days of Joshua putting all options before yourself and say, well, I'll try God, but I want everything else as well. Because I'm not sure I'm not trusting God fully. Or are you the pig? Thinking to yourself, the sacrifice is worth it all. Fully committed, because God is fully committed to me. God has demonstrated his love in what he has done for us through his son. What does

God require of you? But to serve him full commitment, not a contribution, but a full commitment. Jesus said to his disciples, many had turned back and no longer walked and Jesus said to the disciples, do you want to go away as well? You know the words, I'm sure so well.

I'm going to repeat that answered Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. We can often end that you have the words of eternal life. But what comes after is just as important.

We have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. Do you want to go away? The choice is put before us. Choose this day whom you will serve. But may we all say, as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven you continue to speak to us through your words. We thank you that you are a God who is never silent. You are calling upon us to respond to your word. And we thank you Lord that you are a God of faithfulness, a God of covenant. You will never fail us. When we put out trust in anyone else Lord, we are saying we do not fully believe that you are able to help. But help us this day to seek you and seek you only. To whom else can we go? For you alone have the words of eternal life. So Lord bless your word to us and continue with us now and throughout this day. And forgive us Lord for all our distractions, all our sins. And turn us again towards you for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.