

WE WILL SERVE THE LORD

JOSHUA 24:14-15

The first Sunday of the year is always a challenge as to what to preach. We have just completed a very interesting year. The New Year stretches before us like a clean slate. What are we going to do with it? (Read text)

I encourage, whatever else this year brings, determine today to serve God no matter what.

Prior to Moses' death he addressed the Children of Israel one final time before they entered the Promised Land. Moses knew the temptations facing the Israelites when he said in Deut. 30:19,

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now, choose life, so that you and your children may live."

Then, led by Joshua the Israelites enter Canaan, destroy Jericho, and defeat the hostile tribes of Canaan. As God promised, Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey.

Were the Israelites thankful? Not for long! Unbelievably, when the war was over, the very people they had defeated influenced the Hebrews away from God. They weren't defeated in battle, but now they were being destroyed from within.

Here's what was happening. As the Hebrew baby boomers began settling down and as their children, the gen-Xrs came along, they forgot God. They stopped worshipping Him, they forgot to thank Him and what He had done for them.

They got so involved and busy in making a living and in recreation that they didn't have time for God. And they stopped worshipping the one true God and embraced the false Gods of the people they had defeated.

Their lifestyles did not reflect godliness. Their morals went into the gutter. They forgot God's blessings. They were slowly being destroyed from within.

In our Scripture passage for today (Josh. 24), Joshua has brought together the leaders of the

nation and reviewed for them the history of Israel. Their victories were not because they had the strongest armies, or because of their strong economic base.

It was because of almighty God they were in Canaan. In spite of themselves, they were God's chosen people. You would have expected thankfulness, loyalty, and obedience.

At work and home their lives should have revolved around God. Surely they were active in their temples and synagogues.

No, they didn't have time for God and His church. Sound familiar? This could be about the United States today. It could be speaking about us. Listen again to Joshua's admonition: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (v. 15b)

1. There are many choices

Joshua 24:15a, "If choosing the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve."

Make a decision. You have choices, so choose. Outside of Christ, our greatest gift from God, and the one He prizes the most, is the freedom of the will—the ability to reject or choose Him.

It's our nature to make a god of something—job, family, the lake, golf, internet, etc. These may all be good things, but there can be only one God.

Many years ago, Robert Browning said, "This business of life is made up of terrible choices." Satan is constantly telling his lies, trying to get us to choose anything other than God.

Adam and Eve, in the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden, listened to the lies of Satan rather than the truth of God's word. They made the terrible and costly choice to disobey God.

In the New Testament there was a young man we call the Rich Young Ruler. He asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to get rid of all his wealth—his money and possessions.

The young man listened to the devil's lies—happiness is only in things (money, houses, cars, boats, guns). His many things meant more to him than God, more than eternal life.

Jesus wanted the young man's heart so He tested him. Would he be willing to follow Jesus even if following Jesus meant giving up everything the world (Satan) says is important for happiness?

The challenge to us comes down to one of two choices: One, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Prov. 16:25).

The other is to follow Jesus, no matter what. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life . . .” (John 14:6). The choice that must be made is to give our heart to Jesus or not.

There was an elderly gentleman who was crippled up, almost blind, so hard of hearing he couldn't hear the music or the sermon. Yet every Sunday he was in Sunday School and worship service.

Someone asked him, “Why do you keep going to church when it is obvious you can't get anything out of it?” He replied, “Because I want everyone to know whose side I'm on.”

Do others know whose side you're on? What does an elevator do? It goes up or it goes down. You say, “Well, I've got all these choices, all these buttons to choose.”

Yes, there are lots of buttons, but still, the choice is between up or down. You can choose either to ascend to God's desire for you, or you can descend with your own wrong choices. Some descending buttons are...

(1) Conscience

“I'll just follow my conscience. If it feels right and good, that's what I'll do. I'll just follow my conscience. If I feel guilty about it, I won't do it.”

Your conscience is very important, but it can mislead you. It may be dead. It may be seared. It can be misled. You may go the wrong way if you trust your conscience rather than God's Word.

(2) Sincerity

“Pastor, if I am sincere enough in whatever I believe and do, that will be enough. That's all God expects, sincerity.”

Many people listen to this lie of Satan's. “You don't need Jesus. Just be sincere, and that will be enough,” he says. You can be very sincere in what you believe; you can be sincere in the way you live, but if Jesus doesn't have your heart you will sincerely spend eternity apart from God.

No matter how sincere, when we choose to not pay any attention to His commands or precepts—when we choose to live our lives the way we want without any consideration to God's word...

...then sincerity is not enough. God's Word, the Bible, says we must come to the cross and repent of our sins, and let Jesus forgive our sins through His death on the cross.

(3) Good works

A third, common way of thinking is, “God has to reward me for doing good things.” I’ve always wondered how you would know when you’ve done enough good!

Would you decide for yourself? Is there a committee to look at your life and say, “ Hmm, when you’ve served at the Rescue Mission for a year it will make up for one night of drunkenness when you were young.”

No, good works is not a good choice. Ephesians 2:8-9 says: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- (9) not by works, so that no one can boast.” No, the fact is you would always wonder whether your good works outweighed the bad things in your life.

(4) Reformation.

“I’ll reform myself. When I’m ready, when I’m through having fun, then I’ll get my life straightened out.”

Do you see a pattern here? I will follow my conscience (sincere, good works, reform myself). Again, this is something you are going to do rather than letting God transform you. Besides, this is really just playing both sides against the other.

The late Paul Harvey said, “Remember the uncertain soldier in our Civil War who, figuring to play it safe, dressed himself in a blue coat and gray pants and tiptoed out onto the field of battle. He got shot from both directions.

Do you know anyone who has truly reformed themselves? It could happen. There are lots of good, moral people. Through sheer will you may change your life for the better. But you still come up short before God.

C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, “...every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part that chooses, into something a little different than it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, you are slowly turning this central thing either into a Heavenly creature or into a hellish creature...”

2. Only Jesus is the right choice (v. 15b)

“But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

It is up to each of us to make the choice of whom or what we will follow. Your wife or parents

can't pray you into heaven. Their church attendance won't do anything for you.

The greatest battles of life are fought in a lonely arena. Joshua said, "Choose for yourselves whom you will serve." Even as their leader, he knew he couldn't make that kind of choice for them.

So, he said, "Here's what my family and I are going to do, we will serve the Lord." He and his wife, individually, had chosen to follow the Lord.

They had talked it over and made the decision that they would serve God, that they would be godly examples to their children, and teach their children the ways of God.

You face a choice as you face 2010 and the future? You can't change your past. It's over with. But something that happened in the past can change your future.

Two thousand years ago the blood of Jesus Christ was spilled on the cross to cover all your sins—past, present, and future. Because of the cross Jesus is able to forgive all the sins and mistakes you've ever made.

When you accept this forgiveness, you are made right with God. I can't imagine why anyone would choose to reject God. What about you today? Will you choose Jesus?

This means to let Jesus be your Savior and Lord. It means to include Him in every area and every decision of your life.

To follow Jesus means to grow spiritually through reading and studying your Bible. To follow Jesus means allowing change as God grows you up in Him.

What is your choice today? The decision is yours. Indecision itself is a choice. Not to decide is to choose Satan's lies.

Two hundred years ago there were two Scottish brothers named John and David Livingstone. John's life goal was to make money and become wealthy, and he did. He was very successful.

His brother, David, surrendered himself to Christ. He resolved, "I will place no value on anything I have or possess unless it is in relationship to the Kingdom of God."

The inscription over his burial place in Westminster Abbey reads, "For thirty years his life was spent in an unwearied effort to evangelize."

But in the old "Encyclopedia Britannica" John Livingstone is listed simply as "the brother of David Livingstone."

Application:

There are three ways Joshua admonished the people. One, fear the Lord. This is reverential trust in God. Second, serve the Lord. When the heart is right, our actions will show it. And third, get rid of those things that keep you from doing the first two. Joshua made it very plain that the Israelites had to choose whom they would serve. We, too, face the same issue.