

Joshua Series #7  
“Whom Will You Serve?” — Joshua 24:1-28

I. INTRODUCTION

A. RR [Psalm 116: ]

B. Famous Last Words

1. It is often an indication what kind of life a person has lived by looking at their last words
2. Queen Elizabeth I = “All my possessions for a moment of time.”
3. Francois Rabelais, famous French humanist = “I am going to seek a grand perhaps; draw the curtain, the farce is played.”
4. Thomas Hobbes, English philosopher known for his deep pessimism = “I am about to take my last voyage, a great leap in the dark.”
5. Thomas Jefferson, great American humanist = “Is this the Fourth?” He died on the 4th of July, anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, that great document which he penned.
6. Napoleon Bonaparte = “Chief of the Army”
- 7a. The French nurse who was present at the death of Voltaire, a vicious critic of Christianity, was asked to attend another man whose case was critical.
  - a. the nurse asked, “Is he a Christian?”
  - b. the reply was, “He is a Christian in the best sense of the word.”
  - c. “Good,” the nurse replied. “Was there when Voltaire died and I do not want to see another infidel die.”
  - d. history tells us that in his last hours, Voltaire lamented his life of unbelief and was tormented with the reality of his own mortality and the possibility that he would soon stand before a holy judge whom he had defied all his life
- 7b. O. Henry = “Turn up the lights, I don't want to go in the dark.”
8. Legendary swashbuckler Douglass Fairbanks must have been a trifle confused before dying. His last words were, “Never felt better.”
9. James Rodgers last words before facing a firing squad were, “May I wear a bulletproof vest?”
10. PT Barnum, knowing he was breathing his last words

gasped out a question that proved his life was spent in vain, “How were the receipts today at Madison Square Gardens?”

11. Woody Allen once remarked about death, “I’m not afraid of dying, I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”
12. Contrast these last words of the lost with the final words of some believers . . .
13. George Washington, “It is well, I die hard, but I am not afraid to go.”
14. John Quincy Adams, “This is the last of earth! I am content.”
15. Robert E. Lee, “Strike the tent.”
16. DL Moody = “Earth is receding; heaven is approaching. This is my crowning day!”
17. Adoniram Judson’s last words were these, “I fell like a bride who is moving in to her new home. There is no doubt resting on my future.”

#### B. Last Words

1. When a person realizes their time is short for this life, they often pick their words carefully
2. Time being short, it must not be wasted in the frivolous and empty
3. In Richard II, Shakespeare has the dying Duke of Lancaster saying, “O, but they say the tongues of dying men enforce attention like deep harmony: Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain, for they breathe their words in pain.”

#### C. Joshua’s Last Words

1. As we come to the last chapter of Joshua and our last study in the book, we read this great man of faith’s last words
2. Joshua knew he had reached the end of his days
  - a. Ch. 23 begins by saying that Joshua was an old man
  - b. that he was well advanced in years
3. So he called for the nation to gather for one last grand meeting
4. His closing words spoke not just to the people of Israel gathered there at Shechem to hear the hero of their time
5. His words ring out across the centuries to all people

6. And I hope they echo loudly in this hall this morning
  - a. I hope they speak to the very core of our lives
  - b. I hope the challenge Joshua gave the children of Israel that day will grip us today
7. You see, Joshua issued a challenge to Israel that required them to make a commitment
8. If we are to be faithful to the text, then we must realize that same challenge faces us
9. For the word of God is living, and active
10. These are not merely the record of a speech delivered 3500 years ago—these are the words of the HS proclaimed anew to every generation of the people of God
11. So, just as Joshua asked for Israel to declare it's loyalty, We are asked to declare our loyalty

## II. TEXT

### A. Vs. 1

**1 Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.**

1. It was fitting that Shechem should be the site of this last gathering of the nation
2. For it was at Shechem that Abraham had made his first camp when he first came to Canaan some 500 years before
3. Abraham's first altar to God was in Shechem,
4. And it was the first place in the Promised Land that God appeared to him, reminding him of the promises He had made to bless him.
5. When Jacob returned to Canaan after living with his uncle Laban in Mesopotamia for some 20 years, Shechem was the first place he settled,
6. And, like his grandfather Abraham, it was the first place he built an altar to God
7. Shechem was in the very center of the land of Promise and was filled with reminders of God's faithfulness
8. So Joshua chooses it as the site of his most important of all speeches

### B. Vs. 2-13

1. He begins by rehearsing the history of Israel . . .

**2 And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel:**

2. Joshua's words to the nation are not merely his own
3. They were inspired by the HS and Joshua speaks to them not as Joshua, but as God

**'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.**

**3 'Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.**

**4 'To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.**

**5 'Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out.**

**6 'Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea.**

**7 'So they cried out to the LORD; and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, brought the sea upon them, and covered them. And your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. Then you dwelt in the wilderness a long time.**

**8 'And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan, and they fought with you. But I gave them into your hand, that you might possess their land, and I destroyed them from before you.**

**9 'Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose to make war against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you.**

**10 'But I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he continued to bless you. So I delivered you out of his hand.**

**11 'Then you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the men of Jericho fought against you; also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I delivered them into your hand.**

**12 'I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, also the two kings of the Amorites, but not with your sword or with your bow.**

**13 'I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.'**

4. This short recap of their history is given from the right

perspective

- a. lest the people of Israel think that it was by their might and brilliance they won the land
  - b. God repeatedly reminds them that it was *He* who had done it all **FOR** them
  - c. 17 times He says, “I” did it
5. He starts by reminding them that their beginning was not all that hot
- a. their father, that great man of faith, Abraham, along with his father and brother, began, not as worshippers of Jehovah, but as idol worshipping pagans
  - b. they had served the gods of the Babylonians
6. People tend to place Abraham on a pedestal
- a. they get the idea that God chose Abraham because he was a righteous man
  - b. that he was worthy of God’s favor
  - c. they think that Abraham had rejected the false gods of his father
  - d. and had somehow come to faith in the true God
7. In short, people think God chose Abraham because Abraham deserved being chosen
8. But this is not what the record of scripture tells us
- a. Abraham began as an idol worshipping pagan
  - b. it was God’s grace that saved Abraham
  - c. it was solely and only by God’s unmerited favor that Abraham came to realize the idols he worshipped were dead
  - d. there was nothing to merit the favor of God in Abraham!
9. It was by God’s grace that Israel became a great nation
10. It was by His grace that they were delivered from slavery in Egypt —
- a. that they were delivered at the Red Sea
  - b. that they were provided for in the wilderness
  - c. that they were victorious over all their enemies
  - d. and finally, that they now enjoyed the goodness of the Promised Land
11. From start to finish, the history of Israel is the story of God’s grace
12. And so it is with us
- a. God did not extend His salvation to us because

- we were so *wonderful*
  - b. rather, it is a *wonder* He saved us
  - c. John Newton wrote “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a — WRETCH LIKE ME.”
  - d. God’s grace is *amazing*
    - it is unexpected
    - undeserved
    - it is totally surprising!
- 13. And this is precisely where so many non-christians go wrong, you see
  - a. they think that God *owes* them mercy, that He owes them grace
  - b. they are like the skeptic of the gospel who said, “God will forgive me; after all, that’s His business.”
  - c. they need to wake up to the fact that God *owes* them nothing but judgment for their sin
- 14. Listen to God’s diagnosis of the heart of man
  - a. Jer 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”
  - b. Rom 3:10-12 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”
  - c. Isa 53:6 “All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way.”
- 15. This is Joshua’s point
  - a. in reminding the people of their past
  - b. he is not telling them of their great heritage
  - c. but rather, their great God
- 16. Think how much greater the blessings of God’s grace have been to us than they ever were to Israel —
- 17. Eph 2:1-10 “You He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together

with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

B. Vs. 14-15

1. Now that Joshua has rehearsed the history of God’s grace in their past, he moves to a quick response

**14 "Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!**

2. In light of the grace of God, there is only one reasonable response
3. And that is total devotion to Him
4. “Now, therefore . . . “
  - a. this is where the life of faith begins
  - b. as a “therefore” to the grace of God
5. Our devotion to God, our service of Him, is not out of a desire to EARN His favor
6. It is a response to His favor already given!
7. And here is the secret between a defeated and a victorious Christian life
  - a. we cannot, by all our good deeds
    - by all our bible study
    - by all our prayers
    - by all our witnessing
    - serving in the nursery or sunday school
    - by ushering, or greeting
    - by doing this or that
  - b. ever make God love us more
  - c. God already loves us perfectly
  - d. the great secret of the Christian life is learning to bask in the grace and favor of God
  - e. learning to enjoy it and stop trying to give God a reason why He should love us
8. The Christian life is a great “Therefore” to the grace of

## God

- a. our lives are a response to His initiation of love
  - b. we serve, study, pray, work, labor, share, because of His grace
  - c. it is only after Paul has spent 11 chapters of proclaiming the riches of God's grace that he says in Romans 12
  - d. Rom 12:1-2 "I plead with you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."
9. May we not forget this most important truth of the Christian life
10. Joshua's challenge to Israel is this: "Fear the LORD and serve Him with your whole heart and as He has directed you."
11. He is not calling them to a quick, easily made decision
- a. he is not pumping them up to an emotional pitch and then calling for a hurried agreement
  - b. the words he uses speak of a life long commitment
  - c. the verb "serve" is in the continuous tense
  - d. he challenges them to make a decision that will last the rest of their lives
12. Joshua understood the dynamics of decision
- a. there is the need to make a ground-breaking, watershed decision to serve the Lord
  - b. but that decision needs to be ratified and renewed ever single day
  - c. I have made the decision to get up early in the morning many, many times
  - d. but I always make it in the middle of the day when I am wide awake
    - it seems like such a good idea
    - all the extra work I can get down
    - get some extra quality, quiet time with the Lord
  - e. then the next morning rolls around
    - alarm goes off and wakes me from a deep slumber
    - the dream I've been having about being a great man of God seems so much superior to actually getting out of bed and becoming a man of God



- f. it is not enough to make a single decision to serve the Lord, we must go on and renew that decision with a lifestyle of change and service
  - g. Luke 9:23 “if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross *daily*, and follow Me.”
13. But the challenge goes even deeper, **“put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!”**
- a. Israel had already proven herself more than ready to worship idols
  - b. there in her household belongings were some of the little idols that were worshipped in Mesopotamia and Egypt
  - c. after all the years of seeing God provide for and protect her, she still hung on to these little statues of Ra, and Horus, and Ishtar, and the others
  - d. but worship of God is exclusive
  - e. we cannot worship God AND . . . anything else
  - f. He must stand alone in the temple of our heart
14. God will abide no competition for our affection
- a. He will not be content to sit silently along the sidelines of our lives as we serve the idols of our desires and pleasure
  - b. and then when we get into trouble and cry out to Him, come running to our rescue
  - c. either He is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all

**15 "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of 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."**

- 15. The choice Joshua lays before them seems ludicrous
- 16. In light of all that Israel had seen, how could serving the Lord seem evil?
- 17. But isn't that in fact what many people are saying today about giving their lives to Jesus Christ?
  - a. Jesus Christ came because of His great love
  - b. He died because of His great love
  - c. but they look at surrendering to Him and serving Him as a bad choice!
  - d. are you one of those?

18. If you reject Christ, think about your alternatives
19. As Joshua said, "If it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, then choose whom you will serve."
- a. you see, like it or not, as Bob Dylan sang— "Ya' gotta' serve somebody."
  - b. there is no escaping this rule of life
  - c. you serve some god
  - d. the only real choice you have is to serve a false god or the True One
  - e. someone might protest, "Oh no, I don't believe in God so I serve no one but myself."
  - f. well, all you are saying is that you are your own god, and as such, you are worshipping yourself
20. Israel's choices were these: They could serve . . .
- 1) "The gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River"
    - a) These were the gods of Babylon
      - the Babylonian gods were gods of philosophy and science
      - they were gods of the intellect
      - there are many people who claim to be too sophisticated and intellectually astute to believe in a god
      - I will not take the time to show how this belief logically contradicts itself
      - but just suffice it to say that these people worship at the altar of their own intellect
      - and a sorry god their intellect will prove to be when they come to the end of life
  - 2) Joshua also mentioned that they could serve the gods of Egypt in v. 14
    - a) the gods of Egypt were gods of power
      - they ordered nature; brought the rain, controlled the Nile, moved the sun across the face of the sky
      - again, many people today worship the gods of power by living for money and prestige
      - everything they do is determined by how it is going to affect their income and savings
      - they carefully watch their every move to make sure they are staying in control
      - but again, their god will fail them in that last day

3) Or Joshua tells them they can serve the gods of the Amorites —  
Canaanites

a) These were gods of sensual pleasure

- they were gods like Molech, Baal, and Astarte
- gods who were worshipped by the most debased forms of sexual and moral depravity imaginable
- they were gods who promised pleasure
- they were gods of raw lust

- more and more, we see our culture turning to the gods of pleasure and lust

- people will do anything to have their fun, to satisfy their sensual desires

- the spate of problems our own community has recently faced are all a reflection of this

- card club

- pornography store

- exotic dancing; Astarte

- abortion; Molech

21. The challenge of Joshua seems archaic and quaint, until we realize that the ancient gods of Babylon, Egypt, and Canaan are alive and well in the United States today

22. And the choice is to us - Who will we serve? You?

23. I will echo the choice of Joshua!

a. I stand before you declaring without hesitation

b. "As for me and my house—we will serve the Lord."

24. There is something bracing here, something refreshing.

25. There is an air of skepticism and second guessing that has crept in to our age and has infected the church

26. It seems there is so little we can be sure of anymore, and this attitude of skepticism has diluted our convictions

27. Joshua's words sound an unconfusing note of clarity to our hearts - "Me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

28. Joshua took a stand

a. and as the spiritual leader of his home, he made the decision for his whole family

b. we have no record that he turned to Mrs. Joshua and asked her for her permission

- c. as the spiritual leader of his household he knew it was up to him to take the spiritual lead and that if he did, his family would follow
- d. men — be Joshua in your home
  - God has placed you as the spiritual leader of your home
  - that is not your wife's responsibility
  - it is yours and cannot be abrogated

C. Vs. 16-21

**16 So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods;**

**17 "for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed.**

**18 "And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God."**

- 1. Joshua has preached a good sermon
- 2. And the people respond with a positively
- 3. But there is something insincere about their quick response so Joshua replies . . .

**19 But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.**

**20 "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."**

- 4. Apparently Joshua never attended the Fuller School of Church Growth
- 5. Someone should have told him that you do not gain followers by turning their commitment aside
- 6. Who ever heard of a preacher calling for a decision and then when people respond, he tells them to stop and go back?
- 7. But that is what Joshua did here, and for good reason
- 8. You see, he knew something about the people of Israel
  - a. he knew their response wasn't sincere
  - b. they made their response a bit too quickly
  - c. the seriousness of the commitment to serve God had sunk in

- d. so spells out for them what they are making a commitment to
9. **“You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God.”**
- a. The gods of the pagans were gods that didn’t care how you lived
  - b. all they cared about was that you threw them an occasional bone
  - c. that you went to their temple every so often and gave them a gift
  - d. the worship of these idols was all ceremonial and ended at the temple door
  - e. but Jehovah requires complete and total devotion
  - f. in fact, life is His gift and to be spent in His service
  - g. God is not content with an occasional dollar thrown His way —
  - h. He wants it ALL — He wants YOU, lock, stock, and barrel
10. **“He is a jealous God”**
- a. God is not like the false gods of this world that don't mind if you worship others too
  - b. God will tolerate no competition in our worship and devotion
11. Finally Joshua warns them, **“He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.”**
- a. once they have decided for Jehovah, there is no turning back
  - b. You can’t test drive God for a month
  - c. there is no 90-day warranty
  - d. Devotion to God is Total; with a capital “T”
- e. a hog and a chicken walked by a church together and noticed that the sermon that Sunday was to be titled, “What We Can Do To Help The Poor.”
- as hens and pigs are wont to do, they continued down the street in deep conversation
  - finally the hen turned to the pig and said, “I’ve got it. I know what you and I can do to help the poor.”
  - “We can give them eggs and ham.”

- the hog replied, "Oh no. For you, that only means a contribution, but for me it's a total commitment."

- f. God is not interested in contributions; He wants a commitment that's whole hog

**21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, ——— but we will serve the LORD!"**

12. The response is more measured now  
13. And still they reply in the affirmative

D. Vs. 22-24

**22 So Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses!"**

**23 "Now therefore," he said, "put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel."**

**24 And the people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!"**

1. Here is why Joshua hesitated to accept their first response
2. He knew they were still harboring idols
3. If they were sincere about serving the Lord, then it was time to put away the idols
4. It was here at Shechem, at precisely this spot that Jacob had told his family to turn over to him their idols when they first came to the land
  - a. he had taken all of them and buried them under the oak tree that was there in Shechem
  - b. though 500 years have passed, the people of Israel are still clinging to idols
5. Just as Israel was so ready to make a commitment to God but so reluctant to give up her idols, so it is very likely that we have erected idols in our own lives
  - a. sure we are not so crass as to have some little statue on our mantle piece at home
  - b. no, our idols are more subtle, but they are every bit as real
  - c. whatever gives our life purpose and direction is an idol

- d. whatever we are willing to sacrifice for is a god
- e. whatever sits at the center of our choices is the focus of our worship
- 6. As Joshua challenged Israel so the HS challenges us: "Put away the idols from among you."

E. Vs. 25-28

**25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.**

**26 Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.**

**27 And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God."**

**28 So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance.**

- 1. With these words, the ministry of Joshua ends
- 2. V. 29 records his passing
- 3. His last recorded act was to call the people of Israel to a crisis point of decision and faith
- 4. As a testimony of their commitment, he set up a monolith under the same tree that saw the burial of the idols of Jacob's family 500 years before
- 5. And though the years would pass and each member of the nation who was there that day would face different challenges, that monolith would stand as a constant reminder of the commitment they made that day
  - a. in mute testimony it would stand before God as a witness either to them
  - b. or against them
- 6. We have no monolith to mark our commitment
- 7. We have no towering block of granite or marble
- 8. But we have something better by far
- 9. We have each other - living stones whom Christ is building into a holy habitation of God
- 10. We stand as a witness to each other, as a reminder of our commitment

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. Our Moment

- 1. This message marks the end of our study in Joshua
- 2. And in many ways I believe that God has been

preparing us for this moment

3. We have been seeing what it means to walk in faith
4. We have been realizing both the goodness of God and the seriousness of what it means to follow Him.
5. But the time has come for us to make a decision; for us to make a commitment
6. We cannot simply study a passage like this and then go away without applying it personally
7. Church is not a spectator sport; it is a committed community of saved sinners
8. This is our moment, our Shechem

B. Chose!

1. Chose you this day, whom you will serve!