

Jos225 – Time to Choose – Joshua 24

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message, “Time to Choose.” We’re going to Joshua 24, the last chapter in the phenomenal Book of Joshua.

We’ve come to the end of the Book of Joshua! What a great time we have had applying it to our lives. Over and over we’ve said Joshua is about us “*taking possession* of the Promised Life” that God has already given us. God has gone before us. God has won the victories for us (on our behalf) but we must still appropriate (*take possession*) of that Promised Life he has for us.

We’ve learned over and over again in Joshua that God’s Word never fails. God’s promises are sure and steadfast and guaranteed. But we have a role (a responsibility) in order to take possession of those promises.

If we will choose to serve the Lord wholeheartedly and turn from the idols that compete for our devotion to the Lord, being strong and courageous and being careful to obey all of his instruction *then* we will certainly “take possession” of the Promised Life he has for us. Today, at the end of the Book of Joshua, it is *time for us to choose*.

Let’s pray. *Lord Jesus, give us the weight of this final chapter. Lord, just bring the intensity, the severity, the passion of this chapter. Allow it to come to life to us Lord, and back us into a corner where we are required to choose this day whom we will serve. Lord, bring it through your Word and by your Spirit and for the glory of your name, Jesus, amen.*

We began Joshua’s “end of life” messages last week as he laid out “blessing and backsliding”. Today Joshua finishes his final message. And to do that Joshua gathers all of Israel to the most solemn and meaningful place in the land (at the time) and he is going to “recount” to them God’s sovereign, miraculous and perfect power – God is going to speak through Joshua in the first person to all of Israel – in choosing Israel in delivering Israel from bondage and in bringing Israel into the Promised Land.

And then Joshua is going to lay out the only appropriate response to God’s incredible love and miraculous working in their life. Then he’s going to charge them to choose whom they will serve for the rest of their days – and then Joshua is going to die.

Are you ready for it?

### **Joshua 24:1 (NLT)**

***1 Then Joshua summoned all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, including their elders, leaders, judges, and officers. So they came and presented themselves to God.***

Joshua brings all of Israel to Shechem with their leaders out front (where they should be). And notice they present themselves not to Joshua – but to God. Shechem is the most solemn and meaningful place in the Promised Land at this time. Shechem is where the Lord God first appeared to Abraham in the land (Genesis 12) and where God first promised Abraham that he would give this land to his descendants.

And after a wrestling match with God (Genesis 32) that ended with Jacob’s name being changed to Israel. Jacob travelled to Shechem and built an altar to God there and named it “*ELOHIM ISRAEL*” – The God of Israel.

And back in chapter eight of Joshua after sin caused Israel’s only defeat in the Promised Land, Joshua brought all of Israel here to Shechem to make a covenant commitment to the Lord.

And now, Joshua brings all Israel here – again – at the end of his own life to challenge them in a type of *covenant renewal* ceremony. Joshua is doing all he can (before he dies) to keep Israel in God’s blessings and in God’s will.

Now, the first half of this covenant renewal is all about the great things God has done for his people. It’s a recounting of the highlights of God’s grace and mercy and his power in bringing victory to his people.

And as we go through the first half of this covenant renewal from Joshua, can you please put yourself in the “God’s People” place? Romans Chapter 4 says Abraham is the spiritual father of all those who have put their faith in God for salvation. I pray that includes you today and I pray you would see how God has poured out his Grace and mercy and power and victory *for you* in these verses.

Starting in verse 2 God is speaking directly to the people through Joshua (God says “I” twenty-one times) and God goes back to his grace and his plan that started with Abraham.

### **Joshua 24:2-3 (NLT)**

***2 Joshua said to the people, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River (Mesopotamia), and they worshiped other gods. (Were idolaters)***

***3 But I took your ancestor Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him***

*into the land of Canaan* (The promised land). *I gave him many descendants through his son Isaac.*

This verse 3 summarizes the events of Genesis Chapters 12-21 as God begins his plan with a people and a land. (God's covenant with Abraham is a three part covenant 1) the people through Abraham 2) the Promised Land 3) the blessing in Jesus Christ.) And after an incredible journey of faith and obedience Abraham and Sarah finally had the *son of promise* – Isaac.

And then Joshua 24:4.

**Joshua 24:4 (NLT)**

*4 To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir* (Esau's people became enemies of God), *while Jacob and his children went down into Egypt.*

Jacob's name had been changed to Israel. He had his twelve sons who would become the twelve tribes of Israel, and yet they still went into Egypt where they became slaves for 400 years.

And just when it looked like they would never inherit the promises God had made to Abraham, verse 5 explodes onto the scene to set God's people free.

**Joshua 24:5 (NLT)**

*5 "Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I brought terrible plagues on Egypt; and afterward I brought you out as a free people.*

The pronoun changes here to *you* – "I brought you out of Egypt." God had actually built Israel into a great nation under the difficulty and the pressure of slavery in Egypt, and when it was time, God sent Moses and earth shaking miracles to free his people from their bondage to slavery – and once he freed them God protected them, just as he does with us.

**Joshua 24:6-7(a) (NLT)**

*6 But when your ancestors arrived at the Red Sea, the Egyptians chased after you with chariots and charioteers.*

*7 When your ancestors cried out to the Lord, I put darkness between you and the Egyptians. I brought the sea crashing down on the Egyptians, drowning them. With your very own eyes you saw what I did . . .*

When God freed us from our bondage to sin he didn't leave us alone to fight our enemies. He fought our enemies on our behalf, always making a "way of victory" for us, if we would follow him through the red sea *by faith*.

But if we refused to follow the Lord, well then the end of verse 7 happened to us just as it did to Israel.

**Joshua 24:7(b) (NLT)**

***7 . . . Then you lived in the wilderness for many years.***

How many of us have been freed from the bondage of sin – by God's grace. But then we have chosen to live in the Wilderness of Disobedience for so many years. God brought us right up to the edge of the Promised Land, just like he did with Israel. But we didn't believe enough to follow Jesus into the life he had for us and so we turned away and wandered in the wilderness until a part of us died, just like a part of Israel died.

But even while we were wandering in the wilderness God never abandoned us! He was just waiting for us to believe enough to truly follow him in our actions, and then he brought us right back up to the edge of the Promised Land, again! And (prayerfully) this time we were ready to join God in the good fight of faith, just like Israel was.

**Joshua 24:8 (NLT)**

***8 "Finally, I brought you into the land of the Amorites on the east side of the Jordan (on the edge of the Promised Land). They fought against you, but I destroyed them before you. I gave you victory over them, and you took possession of their land.***

As soon as we were willing to believe enough to join God in the fight for the Promised Land, we found out it was actually God who was *going before us*, God who was *fighting on our behalf*, and God who was *giving us victory* over our enemies.

But then we also faced the subtle schemes and deception of the enemy and God rescued us from those as well.

**Joshua 24:9-10 (NLT)**

***9 Then Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, started a war against Israel. He summoned Balaam son of Beor to curse you (Remember Balaam and his Talking Donkey?),  
10 but I would not listen to him. Instead, I made Balaam bless you, and so I rescued you from Balak.***

In the battle we found out that God was rescuing us from the schemes and devices of the enemy because God alone has complete power over all forces that would seek to do us harm, both physical and spiritual.

And when we did (finally) begin “taking possession” of the Promised Life, God brought us victory after victory – too many to count.

**Joshua 24:11 (NLT)**

*11 “When you crossed the Jordan River (into the Promised Land) and came to Jericho, the men of Jericho fought against you, as did the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I gave you victory over them.”*

The battles really start coming once we are inside the Promised Life and God brings us victory after victory there as we just continue to follow him and obey him.

And the Lord goes before us. He sends the power of his Spirit before us to make a way for us and to bring victory to us.

**Joshua 24:12 (NLT)**

*12 And I sent terror ahead of you to drive out the two kings of the Amorites. It was not your swords or bows that brought you victory.*

It was God who went before us and it was God who brought us victory (as we continued to follow him in faith).

And God gives us not only “victory in our battles” but also he gives us “provision in our lives.”

**Joshua 24:13 (NLT)**

*13 I gave you land you had not worked on, and I gave you towns you did not build—the towns where you are now living. I gave you vineyards and olive groves for food, though you did not plant them.”*

We live in the graceful provision of God. He gives us what we do not deserve and he does not give us what we do deserve.

God called us and he adopted us. He cared for us and he protected us. He delivered us from our bondage to sin and he gave us his victory in all our battles and God led us into the Promised Life and God provides all we need – by his grace.

So... what? So... what?

So... what do we do in response to the incredible grace and victory and provision that God has poured into our lives? So what should our response be?

So Joshua 24:14 says,

**Joshua 24:14 (NLT)**

***14 “So fear the Lord and serve him wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord alone.”***

Here in verse 14 begins the other side of this covenant agreement.

God has DONE his PART

God has *ALWAYS DONE* his PART

God *WILL ALWAYS DO* his PART . . .

*So . . . WHAT . . . about OUR PART?*

Joshua says our only reasonable response is to fear the Lord and to serve him wholeheartedly – to put away forever our idols and serve the Lord alone. *That* is the only reasonable response to all that God has done for us.

Now, to fear the Lord does not mean to fear like you fear “Chucky” or the guy with a chainsaw and a hockey mask. The fear of the Lord means to stand in reverent awe of God – in absolute reverent awe of his power and his glory and his position over all of creation.

We have such a problem believing that we are actually the center of the universe. It is an amazing thing to stand in awestruck reverence before the one and only true God of the universe and then to *humbly submit our lives* to him.

And then verse 14 says ***and serve him wholeheartedly***. The word “wholeheartedly” has at its core *integrity*. Serve the Lord with complete integrity not wearing a mask (they call that a hypocrite), not in church only but in truth and integrity. Serve the Lord wholeheartedly.

Then verse 14 says ***put away forever your idols***. And finally we get to say “Oh, that’s easy, I have no idols” (as God raises his eyebrows and slowly shakes his head). Idols come in many shapes and sizes. Idols come in many shapes and sizes.

There are those who say we have become the greatest idol making culture in the world. We are notorious for our American Idols (most of which do not sing). Jesus says in Matthew 6:24 ***“No one can serve two masters...”*** And here Joshua says the only reasonable response to all that God has done for us is for us to put away forever the idols that compete with our love and devotion to God.

And then, just in case we need a concise summary the end of verse 14 says ***“serve the Lord alone”*** not to earn something from God not to somehow “pay God back” but because it is the only reasonable response to who God IS and for all God has DONE for us.

And then, in the famous verse 15 Joshua says it is ***time to choose***.

#### **Joshua 24:15(a) (NLT)**

***15 But if you refuse to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates (the Moon god of UR, kind of like our New Age gods)? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? . . .*** (The pagan gods of Canaan were based primarily on SEX, just like the current gods of our American Culture)

And Joshua says ***It’s time to choose***. You know what the God of Israel has done for you. You know what the idols of this world have done to you. Now it is time to choose.

***“Choose this day – whom you will serve . . .”***

And then that incredible line at the end of verse 15.

#### **Joshua 24:15(b) (NLT)**

***15 . . . But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.”***

The literal translations say ***“my house”*** but “house” here refers to the family within the house. Joshua says I’ve made my decision, me and my family – we are serving the Lord. Now it’s time for YOU to choose.

#### **Joshua 24:16-18 (NLT)**

***16 The people replied, “We would never abandon the Lord and serve other gods.***  
(Really? never?)

***17 For the Lord our God is the one who rescued us and our ancestors from slavery in the land of Egypt. He performed mighty miracles before our very eyes. As we traveled through the wilderness among our enemies, he preserved us.***

***18 It was the Lord who drove out the Amorites and the other nations living here in the land. So we, too, will serve the Lord, for he alone is our God.***

Great job, Israel. You understand that the only “right response” is to serve the Lord wholeheartedly. You KNOW what’s right to SAY... but can you do it, really?

And Joshua responds shockingly in Joshua 24:19.

**Joshua 24:19 (NLT)**

***19 Then Joshua warned the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord, . . .***

WHAAATTT??? I am not able to serve the Lord? I thought that’s what you were trying to get me to say. (So I’m saying it, what’s the problem?)

What might be going on here? Does the people’s response maybe seem too easy to Joshua? (Like they’re just saying what they know they should say.) Was Joshua maybe concerned that their actions were already speaking louder than their words? Because almost ALL the tribes had (to some extent) already left some of the pagan culture of the Canaanite world mixed within their allotment of the Promised Land.

It seems to me that Joshua was concerned that their talk was cheap and this was it, he had one last chance to convince Israel to serve the Lord wholeheartedly.

Re-reading all of Joshua 24:19-20.

**Joshua 24:19-20 (NLT)**

***19 Then Joshua warned the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy and jealous God (which could be a reference to idols already in their lives). ***He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins.******

***20 If you abandon the Lord and serve other gods* (which is obviously a high risk), ***he will turn against you and destroy you, even though he has been so good to you.*****

So the people reiterate their choice.

**Joshua 24:21 (NLT)**

***21 But the people answered Joshua, “No, we will serve the Lord!”***

And then more challenge comes from Joshua and more indication of exactly what his concern was.

**Joshua 24:22-23 (NLT)**

***22 “You are a witness to your own decision,” Joshua said. “You have chosen to serve***

*the Lord.” “Yes,” they replied, “we are witnesses to what we have said.”*

**23** *“All right then,” Joshua said, “destroy the idols among you, and turn your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.”*

Now what Joshua was concerned about seems pretty clear. Destroy the idols that are already among you (they HAD them) and turn your hearts fully to the Lord (they weren't).

Joshua sees the trouble coming. He sees that there are already idols in the people's lives and their hearts are already not fully turned to the Lord.

But again, the people say the right thing.

**Joshua 24:24 (NLT)**

**24** *The people said to Joshua, “We will serve the Lord our God. We will obey him alone.”*

And so now Joshua has done all that he can.

And so we read in Joshua 24:25-29,

**Joshua 24:25-29 (NLT)**

**25** *So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day at Shechem, committing them to follow the decrees and regulations of the Lord.*

**26** *Joshua recorded these things in the Book of God's Instructions. As a reminder of their agreement, he took a huge stone and rolled it beneath the terebinth tree beside the Tabernacle of the Lord.*

**27** *Joshua said to all the people, “This stone has heard everything the Lord said to us. It will be a witness to testify against you if you go back on your word to God.”*

**28** *Then Joshua sent all the people away to their own homelands.*

**29** *After this, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110.*

What a final challenge to the people, for them to make a re-commitment to their covenant to serve the Lord. Joshua had truly done all he could to inspire the people to serve the Lord wholeheartedly.

And finally to me, the greatest epitaph that could ever be written for a servant of the Lord is right here in verse 31.

**Joshua 24:31 (NLT)**

**31** *The people of Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the*

***elders who outlived him—those who had personally experienced all that the Lord had done for Israel.***

As long as Joshua and the elders who served with him were alive, the people continued to serve the Lord.

Tell me, where in your life are you a Joshua? Where in your life is someone serving the Lord (at least partially) because of your encouragement and support? Be sure to remind them of God's grace and his mercy and his unlimited power to bring victory into their lives. And then, as necessary, challenge them to renew their covenant to serve God wholeheartedly.

Today is another new day and today it is time to choose.

***Choose THIS DAY whom you will serve***

***For me and my family***

***we WILL serve the Lord wholeheartedly – until the end.***

Let's pray. *Lord, right now in just a moment of stillness, bring that conviction. Allow each of us to choose right now. Lord please, save us from ourselves, from the idols of this world, from our fleshly tendencies. Fill us with your Spirit, that we would stand in awe of you, that we would serve you wholeheartedly, that we would turn forever from our idols, that we would serve you alone – because of all you've done for us. It's the only reasonable response. God fill us with your Spirit to do it and bring "Joshua's" alongside us to exhort and encourage and challenge us. To continue following hard after you and serving you whole heartedly. And then, we get to die. And we get to come into your presence with a servant's welcome. Make us that way, Lord. For you glory in our lives, for your glory in this church, and in this place and in your name, Jesus, amen.*