

“AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE”

A Mother’s Day Sermon

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Joshua 24:14-15

- 14 "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness.
Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the
River and in Egypt,
and serve the LORD.
- 15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you,
then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve,
whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the
River,
or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living.
But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

INTRODUCTION

Did you know that at Starbucks you can get your cup of coffee in 19,000 different ways? We love to have it my way! Sometimes we can have too many choices, can't we? When we go to a fast food restaurant where you stand at the counter and order from all those choices printed above the counter, I'm usually rather unimaginative and go with some standard, run-of-the-mill affair I've tried and know I like. Polly gets quite excited about all the choices. I like the known, she usually wants to "try something different." If there's not a line with at least people ahead of us, I know we might as well just step aside and stand back while she ponders her selection.

Choosing can be confusing. The problem is, in saying yes to one thing, you are saying no to other things. Sometimes we like to keep our options open. There are choices that have little consequence such as ordering food. But there are some that shape the rest of our lives. Sometimes, what seems like a little choice ends up changing everything—things like drinking and driving or driving too fast. We have a friend, who in his early 20's dove off a bridge in a place where they often swam and broke his neck. He has been a quadriplegic for the last 40 years. How often has he wished he could undo that seemingly small decision?

But, there's another category of choices I want to focus on this morning. These are choices freely made that define our lives in positive ways. In making the choice, our lives become more focused, peaceful, and free. Those of you graduating from high school are experiencing one of those times—the rest of us can remember it. You've had to, or are in the process of choosing a college and/ or career. Once the choice is made, isn't it a relief? It's no longer: "Will I be at Whitworth, the U. of W., or W.S.U.? Will I be in the marines or air force?" Instead, we have a specific direction to begin orienting everything else around. Those of you who are married, do you recall the relief you felt when you finally made the big decision, "This is the one I want to marry and spend the rest of my life with?" Those are liberating choices.

Our Scripture this morning is a call to make the most important decision of our lives.

CHOOSE!

The Book of Joshua is an exciting book about the conquest of the promised land. After being delivered out of bondage in Egypt, and wandering in the desert for 40 years, Moses dies and the leadership passes to Joshua. That's where the Book of Joshua begins. Under Joshua's leadership, they cross the Jordan river and with the collapse of the walls of Jericho, the conquest of the promised land begins. Now, after the battles are over, and Joshua is near the end of his life, he calls the nation together at Shechem. He reminds them of God's faithfulness, provision and deliverance. Then we come to our text:

*"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness.
Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt,
and serve the LORD.
But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you,
then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve,
whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River,
or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living.
But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*

The new nation of Israel is at a fork in the road: choose the LORD or the gods of this world. Get off the fence. It's one or the other!

*But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you,
then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, (15)*

Make a choice and direct your living by that choice. At a number of junctures in Israel's history, God calls them to reaffirm their choice, their decision to follow God.

On Mother's Day, our thoughts are drawn to our families. And, it feels like a good time to me to think about and reaffirm Joshua's witness, "*as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*" What we do regarding the Lord is absolutely foundational for our families. It is the commitment upon which our marriage vows rest and our baptismal vows we take at our children's baptism. It is only with the Lord's power and help we will be able to keep the network of promises that make healthy families.

If we don't have our heads buried in the sand, we realize we live in perilous times. The family unit is the basis of society. It is where we learn love, kindness, good communication skills, patience, and the skills of building solid relationships with others. Character is developed and values are taught. We are equipped to face the world and problems in life with healthy self-esteem and coping skills. Healthy families make good civilizations. It is the way God designed our world to work.

For decades now, the world has been downplaying the commitment of marriage. Do

you realize that during the decade of the 1990s, according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics:

households headed by unmarried partners grew by 72%?

33% of all babies were born to unmarried women?

From 1960 to 1998, cohabitation increased by 1000%.

And, of course, in all these situations, God can and does give forgiveness to those who seek it and helps us in our difficulties. I and the church always stand ready to be a help and support. But we need to affirm the Biblical standard of the nuclear family— a man and woman committed to love each other for a lifetime and rearing their children in a supporting atmosphere of love and faith— is the way it's supposed to be.

The point we need to be aware of in those statistics I just cited is, that our whole society is in a process of redefining what marriage and family is— a definition contrary to the design of our Creator. This can only be to our great peril. Now some are going so far as to say that we can redefine what marriage itself is and that it need not be between one man and one woman. That is something most of us couldn't even imagine a decade ago.

Increasingly, it feels to me like our society has driven into a huge bank of fog regarding family values and the Christian faith. You know how disorienting fog can be. I can remember skiing up on Big Mountain in Whitefish and skiing into a bank of fog that in combination with the white snow made it so you couldn't even tell which way was uphill and which way was down. That's about where our culture has gotten. Everything is being redefined to our liking. If you want to call up down and black white— well, why not? And, back to our point, you can define marriage and family in any way that seems good to you.

But, did you know, that if you walk 100 yards through a fog, the length of a football field, you will typically come in contact with about half a cubic inch of water? That's about a tablespoon of water— hardly enough to get a drink. Yet, it seems so huge, so substantial, so overpowering.

The moral fog being generated in our day has very little substance in reality. It can't stand up to truth. Much of it is rooted in self-absorption in individualism and my rights coupled with a redefining of tolerance as the ultimate value. Tolerance used to mean recognizing and respecting other's beliefs or practices without necessarily agreeing or sympathizing. This is of course good, and an expression of Christian love and kindness. BUT, tolerance now seems to have been altered into saying: all beliefs are equal; all lifestyles are equal; all truth is equal; in fact, there is no absolute truth or right and wrong. Therefore, we should keep our convictions private, to ourselves— lest we be branded a fanatic, bigot, or perceived as intolerant! Curiously, this rule of keeping our convictions private seems to only apply to a Christian world view. That must not be tolerated! Anything else is accepted.

It is in the context of our current world situation I want us to see the hope our text brings

to us. I can easily get discouraged by much of what I've just said. I often think of that question David asks in Psalm 11, verse 3,

*When the foundations are being destroyed,
what can the righteous do?*

He's already rejected the idea of escape,

How can you say to me:

"Flee like a bird to your mountain (1).

Don't you sometimes feel like running, trying to escape, ignoring the bad news? The choice David makes is, *In the Lord I take refuge (1)*. That is also the direction our text is leading us. Make a decision, a clear unambiguous choice. That is what we need to guide us in the confusion of these times. Aren't those reflecting posts along the road a wonderful gift in a fog? You can pick them out, and stay on the right road. That is the gift our text offers us:

...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve,

followed by Joshua's witness,

...But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

A little over a year ago, there was that horrible tragedy in the loss of the space shuttle Columbia and the entire crew on re-entry. Since then, we learned what truly outstanding men and women these crew members were. What we've learned the commander of the crew, Rick Husband, has been especially inspiring. He was a magnetic follower of Jesus Christ. He quoted, from memory, verses from Joshua 1 to prepare his crew the night before the launch. He prayed with his crew just before they met the press and then boarded the shuttle. He molded his diverse crew into a bonded team. But what is truly awesome is the picture that emerged of Rick Husband as a father. His practice was to have a devotional time each day with his daughter and his son. Before he left, Rick made 17 videos for his daughter and 17 for his son, each one a "devotional with Daddy" for each day he was scheduled to be gone. These were times with the Word of God and Daddy praying for them. Can you imagine the treasure that is to them? Here is someone in the tradition of Joshua, *...But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*

What does it mean to choose the LORD? How can we be proactive rather than drift along in a default mode set by the world. Our text gives two ingredients:

*"Now **fear** the Lord and **serve** Him with all faithfulness."*

FEAR THE LORD

"Fear" may not be a confusing word for us today to describe the attitude Scripture is talking about here. We can think of the statements in Proverbs:

Prov 9:10– *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Prov 14:27– *"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,"*

"The fear of the LORD" is a good thing. It does not mean we live in constant terror of God or that God is like eager to zap us or send calamity our way if we get out of line.

Jesus came to forever settle those misgivings. Jesus is the perfect interpretation of the nature of God. Here we see love, grace, and compassion. But, we also need to “fear the LORD” lest we think God’s love has no toughness in it and is mushy and sentimental. Words like “reverence, awe, respect” get close to the Biblical meaning for us. “Respect” as in the idea of those in authority over us, who hold power over us. This is meant to govern our relationship with our parents, teachers, principals, and your boss. They may love you, and you may love them, but it is not a buddy-buddy kind of relationship. You know your place, and their will is to be obeyed. They are in charge, not you.

Also, respect can be thought of as being mindful of the dangers of being careless, such as in working with electricity. It means exercising due care and alertness because we know the power that is there to kill us or cause serious damage to us or others. There is a scene in C. S. Lewis’s children’s The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe that summarizes this idea. The children ask Mr. & Mrs. Beaver about Aslan the Lion (who represents Jesus in these stories). After Mr. Beaver describes the might and majesty of Aslan, Lucy asks:

“Is he— quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver. “If there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or just plain silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the king, I tell you.”

Yes, God is good. But He is not like a tame animal to do our bidding. We approach Him with reverence and awe.

Many in our day have moved too far and have lost that sense of reverent awe. They treat sin rather casually. Sometimes when I talk to someone about a sinful course of action they are deliberately embarking on, I even get, “Yes, I know it’s wrong, but God will forgive me.” And I feel like crying out, “Have you no fear of God?” Frankly, I would be terrified to deliberately step outside the will of God in a calculated, known act of disobedience. O yes, sin can be forgiven. But, there are also incredibly painful consequences for such acts. And I’ve seen enough as a pastor to know I don’t want to knowingly step outside God’s will, His protection, and His favor in a deliberate, planned course of action.

Applied to our households, this means teaching and living our lives under God, carefully obedient to His will and instructions for our homes and our lives. It means modeling and training our children in an accurate view of God.

SERVE THE LORD

*“Now **fear** the Lord and **serve** Him with all faithfulness.”*

“Serve” is the second word for us to live by. We were not created to just do our own thing, whatever that may be. Deep within every human there is implanted a divine sense of purpose. Our **40 Days of Purpose** through Lent was a journey in discovering

that.

Let's think in terms of what this means for our families. A good place to start is to evaluate everything we do with the question, "How would Jesus handle this? What would be honoring to Him?" As a husband, as a wife, as a parent, as a child— am I making choice and behaving as Jesus would want me to? Also, it means making a concerted effort to seek God's direction for the whole of our lives. It involves what we watch on TV, what we spend our money on, and how we spend our time.

There is no more important way of serving the Lord than within the context of our families. Training our children and leading them to follow Christ is way more important than our prosperity and pursuit of "the good life." Nothing is greater in serving the Lord than in developing a healthy, loving marriage. The Bible says such a marriage gives witness to the world of the kind of love Christ has for His church. In short, our homes are designed by God to be a citadel of light in this world in the way they function.

CONCLUSION

Certainly there is much going on in our world that we have little control over. But my heart is made bold and encouraged by Joshua's challenge this morning. There is great power in our choosing and committing our lives to that choice. And in making that choice to truly serve the Lord, we can have confidence in the power of the Lord to preserve our homes against the storms raging about them. As we obey Him, He will empower us to be the family member He wants us to be. As we study His Word and pattern our homes after the Biblical model, we need not be afraid.

As you make your choice, don't keep it to yourself. This text is powerful in Joshua's bold witness: *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

My mother never left any doubt in our minds of her choice. Nothing would hold her back in serving the Lord. She served Him first in her family. She interceded in passionate prayer for each of her children. She spent countless hours reading to us, telling us the Biblical stories, and letting us in on how God is alive and actively involved in our daily affairs. Growing up in our home, there was never anything boring or irrelevant about the faith. We knew God was involved, that He answered prayer in miraculous ways, and we also knew nothing could hold a candle to the exciting life of following Jesus. No wonder all three of her children ended up in full-time ministry.

How about you this morning? Will you stand with Joshua and say,
As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord?