

Broomfield



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A Call of Devotion

Last Words

As you know, I love the “final words” of people. Somehow it seems as though an entire life can be summarized by the poignant statements made at death's door. For example, take Joseph's last words:

Genesis 50:24-25, “And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.”

What a summary of the life of this patriarch!

Or recall Moses' final words:

Deuteronomy 33:29, “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.”

Is this not the theme of the Exodus?

Or consider the final recorded words of the Apostle Paul:

2 Timothy 4:22, “The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen”

The ending of Joshua is like this. It gives a poignant exhortation upon which we could build a life. Let me give you the background.

In our text, Joshua 24:15, Joshua is 110 and about to die. Now knowing that he was soon to pass from the scene, Joshua wanted to give a final charge. He first gives a charge to the leaders of Israel — which is Joshua 23. And then he gives a charge to the entire company of the people of God- —which is the content of Joshua 24.

Our text is found in Joshua's final appeal to the people of God, and thus it contains Joshua's final words — and what an exhortation! This exhortation is presented in the form of a Covenant Renewal Ceremony.

Here Joshua's message exhorts the people of God unto fidelity in their walks with Christ. Now fittingly, our text is the climax! Joshua 24:15 is the summary of the ministry and work of this man of God who lived so long ago.

- And what is the message?
- What is it that Joshua stood for in his life?
- And what ought to be the theme of our life?

The answer to these questions is this: Devotion to the Kingdom of God.

However, before we get to the exhortation Joshua first acknowledges the cost of a life devoted to the Lord.

Joshua 24:15, “**And if it seem evil¹ unto you to serve the LORD**, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

The word rendered here *evil*, has some very broad connotations in the Hebrew. For example the word can denote that which is evil in essence — and thus that which is wicked, vile, hateful, or hostile toward God.² In fact, the essential meaning of the word is seen in its frequent usage with the word, *good*. For example Moses concluded, “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil” (Deuteronomy 30:15).

And yet, it is not always so cut and dry with this word. For it also has a relative element built into it, and thus can be translated as *bad* or *displeasing*. When it has this nuance it always is accompanied by the phrase, *in your eyes* or *unto you*. Now in this instance³ — of which there are seventy-five examples in the Bible — it primarily denotes that which is detrimental in terms of its effects on man. In light of this the word *evil* can be used to designate experiences which entail physical pain⁴ emotional difficulty⁵, and extreme sorrow⁶.

It should be obvious on account of the statement here, *unto you*⁷, that our text is using the term according to the latter. In light of this, (don't miss it!) Joshua here recognizes that the people of God had walked a difficult path in the service of God's Kingdom. And so here, he acknowledges that fact!

Indeed, the generation to whom Joshua is speaking had spent forty years wandering in the desert — the Wilderness of Zin and its environs. They've witnessed their loved ones die horrible deaths on account of their refusal to trust God when first God's people came to the Promised Land.⁸ They've known numerous days when they went without food or water. They've known difficulty, hardship, sleepless nights, danger,

¹ רעע ra'a'

² Compare also 2 Samuel 14:17; 19:35; 1 King 2 3:9; Isaiah 7:15; it is also used in Genesis 2:9, 17 in “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

³ When it is a denominative verb

⁴ Compare Numbers 16:15; 1 Chronicles 16:22; and Psalm 105:15

⁵ Compare Genesis 43:6; Numbers 11:10-11

⁶ Compare Ruth 1:21; and 1 Kings 17:20

⁷ The ESV uses “in you eyes” the NASB “in your sight”

⁸ Compare Numbers 13 & 14

and the extreme temperatures of the desert. They were asked to cross a roaring river at flood stage.⁹ They were circumcised in the presence of their enemy.¹⁰ They were vulnerable so that an army of children could have conquered them. They had suffered a horrible and tragic defeat at Ai.¹¹ And though they fought in many winning battles, that wouldn't necessarily lessen the sorrow that would have occurred on account of the loss of father, brother, son, and child! Truly the people of God to whom Joshua is speaking had suffered much. And this is the “kicker” — all that they suffered was NOT in spite of their relationship with Christ, BUT because of it!

This passage should remind us of Christ and His words to the disciples.

John 15:20, “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.”

Paul reminded us by saying “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Barnabas exhorted the body of Christ in Asia saying that “through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

It should also remind us of the martyrs in the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 11:36-38, “And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

Truly pain and suffering will accompany the would-be servant of Christ. And it is to this truth that Joshua alludes to here.

Now we are going to talk about the choice he gives them in a moment, but for now recognize with Joshua that if you are a child of God, then there will be a cost associated with following Christ. “Flowery beds of ease” should not be our expectation or longing because we are strangers and aliens in this world with a difficult call resting upon our lives.

This brings us to this very important question: Do you understand that being a Christian means being a fool for Christ?¹²

1 Corinthians 4:10-13, “We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. “

.Honestly, I think we've lost sight of this fact. I look around Christendom, and I see a longing for

⁹ Compare Joshua 3

¹⁰ Compare Joshua 5

¹¹ Compare Joshua 7

¹² 1 Corinthians. 4:10a, 10c, 10e, 11, 12a, 12c, 13a, 13c:

acceptance and relevance on the part of families, households, and children. They are seeking popularity, ease, and the passing pleasures of this world.

Now don't get me wrong, if in walking with Christ you have enjoyed success, popularity, and the approval of your peers, there is nothing wrong with that. What is being addressed here is the **LONGING** to be accepted and endorsed by this passing world. It is the continuing **EXPECTATION** that you can have Christ and the world too. It is the longing **ANTICIPATION** that because God loves you, so will the world.

Listen people of God: It will be difficult to serve the Lord. Friendship with the world is hostility toward God.¹³ And thus you cannot look upon fidelity in your walk with Christ without agreeing with Joshua here: it may be a disagreeable thing to serve the Lord

Temptations to a Life Devoted to the Lord

And that brings us to another acknowledgment on the part of Joshua; there are temptations to a life devoted to the Lord.

Joshua 24:15, “[Since it has been very difficult to serve the Lord] **choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell:** but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

In this exhortation Joshua identifies two of the world-views which will vie for our attention as children of God — certainly the world-views that were vying for attention in his day.

Religion of Self

First he identifies what I have termed the Egyptian worldview.¹⁴ “the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River.” When one studies the Egyptian religion there are a couple of things that immediately stick out: first, there were many gods. Egypt was not monotheistic. They had deities like Amon, Anubis, Orsiris, Isis, Ra, Horus, and many, many, more.

However, there was a sophistication to their religion which makes it stand out as one of the more moral systems in the ancient world. Egypt prized science, technology, reason, and progress. If you and I could

¹³ Compare James 4:4

¹⁴ This chapter presents two possibilities for “the gods which your fathers [most likely referring to Abraham] served that were on the other side of the flood.” Joshua 24:2 would appear to give the obvious reference to the Sumerian Babylonian religions. Whereas Joshua 24:14 would epexegetically make the reference the “River of Egypt.” This is further bolstered by the reference of the Jordan River in verse 11.

In light of this, this doesn't mean that what is presented in this sermon is wrong (for verse 14 references the gods of the Egyptians as a worldview that God's people ought not to adopt). It does mean that the worldview in reference by the gods “beyond the river” was the worldview of the Babylonians.

Babylonian cosmology is similar in many aspects to Egyptian cosmology. In fact many scholars debate whether Babylonian cosmology or Egyptian cosmology influenced Moses in the writing of the creation account in Genesis 1. Both Babylonian and Egyptian cosmology are poly-theistic. Both valued morals, and technological advancements. Babylonian cosmology is also the source of Assyrian and Canaanite religions

go back to this culture in a time machine — depending on the era¹⁵ We would discover biologists, chemists, geologists, physicians, and mathematicians. We'd also see an emphasis on sports and athletics and the prominence of women.

.As such Egyptian religion took on a “rationale” tone such that it prized the intellect, service, fulfillment, and the advancement of self. It was very self-centered, and therefore stands as the epitome of the religion of self!

These gods live in our culture today. They are represented in many places as the “I'm O.k., You're O.K.” approach to life. They are gods which cost us little but promise much. They can be placed in the background on a shelf, but easily accessible to us when we need them. They don't care what we believe, so long as we are true to what we believe. They are easily placated and rarely angry. Such is a major temptation today when it comes to service in the Kingdom of God — looking out over our culture as ones struggling in our service of the Lord, these gods can be tempting.

Who wouldn't want a religion that costs us nothing, but grants us everything? Who wouldn't like to believe in the potential of man? Who doesn't like to have happiness, fulfillment, and goodness?

And thus to a generation who knew what suffering for the Lord meant, Joshua references the first temptation that no doubt would confront them — The Religion of Self!

Religion of Pleasure

And this brings us to the second temptation — the religion of pleasure. This is the Amorite worldview — “the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell.”

A study of the gods of the Amorites is a study of the gods of the land of Canaan. For the Amorites were not alone in Palestine. They dwelt in this rather small geographical area together with the Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, and the Canaanites and the other “ites” that lived in the land. Together these cultures shared a common religion which revolved around placation, ascendancy, human sacrifice, sexual perversion, deviance, and gross illicit experience.

In fact the religion of the Amorites began in Genesis 9. Here we read of the time when Noah became drunk and “uncovered himself inside his tent.” Now it is not clear exactly what is going on here, but it no doubt this event involved something sexual as “uncovering” was a Hebraism involving sex. Well along came his son Ham who “Beheld the nakedness of his father.”¹⁶ And rather than being shocked, he was allured. No doubt with much fascination he told his two brothers — expecting them likewise to be fascinated.¹⁷ And yet, Shem and Japheth didn't flinch. They immediately walked backwards with a blanket and covered their father.¹⁸ When Noah awoke the next morning and discovered what had happened, he cursed Ham and his descendants.¹⁹

The descendants of this immoral and perverse individual — Ham — were the Canaanites. And they also inherited his perverse taste for pleasure. They became a people whose name is synonymous with moral

¹⁵ Compare. *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* by John Wilson, pp. 30, 195, 202

¹⁶ Compare Genesis 9:22

¹⁷ Compare Genesis 9:22

¹⁸ Compare Genesis 9:23

¹⁹ Compare Genesis 9:25

debauchery, Ham's descendants were those that inhabited Sodom and Gomorrah — two cities that were destroyed by God on account of their wretchedness and debauchery.²⁰ God said of these people, “Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord” (Genesis 13:13).

In light of all of this, if we were to summarize the religion of the Amorites (a culture part and parcel of Canaan), the phrase that would come to mind would be “the lust for physical pleasure.”

Now need I say that these gods inhabit our land as well?

On account of the internet, today sensual pleasure can be had by the click of a mouse. Howard Stern has made millions on account of his appeal to sex and depravity. A typical evening line up on the television involves programs dedicated to depravity:

- Sex and the City — a show involving adultery and fornication.
- Will and Grace — a show involving homosexuality.
- Programs where married couples are placed on an island and tempted to infidelity.
- Programs where marriage partners are switched.

Now, television isn't the only place headlining perversity. Look at the box office hits at the theater:

- The Kinsey Report — a movie about a sexual pervert who experimented on children in the name of “scientific research.”
- Brokeback Mountain— a highly acclaimed movie that seeks to glamorize adultery and sexual perversion.

And thus the appeal of our culture — the spirit of the age — is a message which says sexual pleasure is as natural as eating. There are no rules except the ones that you personally impose upon yourself or your partner.

This god of pleasure is alive and well in our day and it calls out to the Christian struggling to serve the Lord. How often have you heard: One look won't hurt? Or, come on, everyone else is doing it? Just let go and enjoy.” You deserve it, after all the things you have been through?

Such was the second temptation that appealed to the Israelites — these burdened people of the Lord. And such are the temptations that confront any Christian struggling to fight the good fight of faith today.

- Young people — you want to be accepted, have fun and be part of the group. So what do you do? You dress like the nations in whose land you are living. You act like the nations in which you are living. You talk like the nation in which you are living. After all you hear that you are free in Christ, so just let go and enjoy!
- Adults — you are tired of the struggles of life and responsibility is suffocating you. So what do you want to hear? God wants you to be happy and fulfilled. Morph Christianity into a religion of self and live for your cause. After all it's not a big deal; God exists to make you happy!

.Such a difficult road that we have been called to plow. Truly, the cost of following Christ is great! On either side of the road we find these two temptations: Transforming Christianity so that it revolves around

²⁰ Compare Genesis 19

you and your pleasure.

The Call of Devotion

These are the temptations! Now what is the call?

Joshua 24:15, “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: **but as for me and my house, we will serve²¹ the LORD.**”

The word rendered *serve* is an important word. It is related to the Hebrew term 'ebed which is the primary word for servant or slave. However the nuance in 'abad is the giving of oneself to something.²² So for example, when used of tilling the ground, it denoted NOT just a casual attention BUT the diligent oversight and care of a farmer tending to his fields.²³

And so the call of Joshua to the people of God here involved a whole-hearted, all-consuming passion when it came to the service of God. In fact, the Hebrew uses a tense here for “serve” which expresses continuous action²⁴ — involving both the past, present, and future. In other words, one cannot serve God part-time. There is no such thing as “off the clock” for the child of God. One must serve at all times and in all places. Kingdom Living involves endeavoring to labor unto the Lord. And that brothers and sisters, constitutes the CALL of this text.

- What do you tell a people who have suffered so much in the name of Christ?
- What do you say to one who is tempted to morph Christianity either into the religion of self, or the religion of pleasure?
- What is the word of encouragement?

The answer to these questions is that one must strive in your walk to render a greater service! One must give themselves wholly unto God. One has done well, but strive still more!

Is this not the apostolic message? To a persecuted and troubled congregation, Paul wrote these words:

Philippians 1:9-10, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.”

And yet the call here goes beyond this. For what are the words of Joshua? “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord...” This is such an important statement. See Joshua here wasn't only concerned for himself and his own service in the kingdom of God. His exhortation reflected the reality of what we have

²¹ עִבַּד 'abad

²² In fact, the word was used to denote the service that was rendered to God by the Levitical priests (Numbers 3:7-8; 4:23, 30, 47; 8:11, 19ff; 2 Chronicles. 8:14).

²³ Compare Genesis 2:5

²⁴ It is a qal imperfect which lays stress on an incomplete action. In other words, Joshua has served God in the past, yet his service still is incomplete. He therefore will continue to labor at serving the Lord.

become in Christ, family, a covenant community!

And thus the call to kingdom living is a call that involves much more than just ourselves, our spouses, our children BUT the entire body of Christ — the household of God!

And so I dare say that on the Day of Judgment the question will not just be were you faithful? Or were you faithful in raising your children to love Christ? NO! The question will go beyond this to the entire family of God!²⁵ True and undefiled religion is “caring for widows and orphans” (James 1:27). Fidelity as a member of the body of Christ involves “stimulating one another on to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

The Goal of Your Walk in Christ

Have you set this as your goal in your walk with Christ?

Well, such was the call that Joshua issued to the people of God at the close of his life — the call of

- Diligence in one's walk.
- Striving to render to God that which is His due.
- Laboring to present not only yourself, but the entire body to God as a vessel of honor.
- Fidelity to the Kingdom of God.

Now from all of this I hope you see that service in the kingdom of God is always a present tense proposition. In other words one cannot put off service until tomorrow. One cannot wait until he graduates so that life in Christ will begin. One cannot start after the party; it's not when you are sober; it is not when your current struggle is over.

NO!

EVERY THOUGHT AND ACT IS THE SERVICE YOU RENDER TO GOD at every moment! In the words of Joshua, “OUR SERVICE IS NEVER COMPLETE!”

You say, ”How brutal! What drudgery! You mean in Christ I have been called to take up my cross and follow the Lord in every place and at all times?”

Indeed! But would you notice that it is not drudgery; it is privilege. In fact, the word used by Joshua here for *serve* — when used in reference to God — is never viewed as bondage in Scripture! It is just the

²⁵ Amazingly, here the generation of God's people in Joshua's day failed. When it came to their own personal service, by and large they were faithful (Joshua 24:31). But in the very next book of the Bible, in the second chapter where this very verse is repeated, we are told.

Judges 2:10-12: “And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals, and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger.”

How incredibly sad! The adults got it; but they forgot the children. The adults insured that they would walk faithfully with their God; but they failed to teach their children!

opposite. The one who “serves the Lord” in the Old Testament — who participates in this life-consuming call — is said to know nothing less than joy and freedom.²⁶

Yet, you say, “How can this be? How is it that in becoming a slave of God we are freed from slavery?”

The answer ought not to surprise us. Think back again to the temptation that confronted the Israelites of our text: The religion of Egypt which was the Religion of Self and the religion of the Amorites which was the Religion of Pleasure. Did you know that behind both of these religions — and for that matter every false religion — is a demon?

1 Corinthians 10:20, “But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.”

And thus to the ignorant and foolish who follow the seductive cry of these false religions, the end will always be misery, destruction, and ultimately death.

Proverbs 7:22-23, “He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.”

Ah, but to come to Christ and take up the yoke of slavery. Do you know what you will find?

Matthew 11:28-30, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

To live a life of service and devotion to God is no loss, but only gain. Oh yes, you no doubt will forfeit the passing pleasures of sin, autonomy, and the freedom to participate in your sin. But in the process you will enjoy what Paul labeled, “life indeed” (1 Timothy 6:19).

But you say this morning, “Woe is me! I have not been faithful to my covenant God. I have been guilty not only of serving the gods of Egypt, but the gods of the Amorites as well. I have not cared for the body of Christ. My focus has been me and mine! I have not encouraged the body; I’ve sat as a judge and condemned it!”

Shechem

Brothers and sisters, may I encourage you today?

Where were the people of God standing when they received Joshua's exhortation here? At Shechem.²⁷

What was the significance of Shechem?

It was the first place in the Promised Land that God manifested Himself to Abraham and there promised

²⁶ Compare Exodus 3:12; 4:23; 7:16, 26; 10:26; Psalm 22:31; Job 21:15; Jeremiah. 2:20; Malachi 3:12

²⁷ Compare Joshua 24:1

to be his God.²⁸

So do you understand the significance here?

When Joshua set out to exhort the people of God to be faithful to God, he chose the place which spoke more than anything of God's grace and mercy such that if the message of Joshua stung, and if it moved the people of God to conviction, and if it wounded and exposed tender parts unto the Lord then the people of God needed only to look at the ground upon which they were standing — a ground that spoke of grace, mercy, and forgiveness!

Well today brothers and sisters, we do not look to Shechem as the place of covenant renewal, but to the cross!

Thus, if this message has stung, or exposed your sinful proclivities, or shown you where you have fallen short, then look at the ground upon which you are standing. The ground upon which you stand speaks of grace, mercy, and forgiveness. It cries for your forgiveness and pardon.

Brothers and sisters, .I do not know your sin this day or the intentions of your heart, but I know the Savior!

So — in the spirit of Joshua — would you gather around the cross with me this day and receive the word of the Lord. Though, service in God's Kingdom is accompanied by difficult and weary days and you are tempted by — and maybe you've fallen into — the religion of self and the religion of pleasure. Come to the forgiveness of the cross and let us strive more diligently in our service of God and let us do so together!

²⁸ Compare Genesis 12:6-7

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About the Preacher

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