

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
August 26, 2018  
14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: We Will Serve the Lord  
Rev. John Crow

Joshua 24:1-2, 14-25  
Psalm 16  
Ephesians 5:21-33  
John 6:60-69

**Joshua chapter 24**

**2** [Joshua said to all the people,] "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.

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

**4** 'To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau, and to Esau I gave Mount Seir to possess it; but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.

**5** 'Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt by what I did in its midst; and afterward I brought you out.

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

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

**8** 'Then I brought you into the land of the Amorites who lived beyond the Jordan, and they fought with you; and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land when I destroyed them before you.

**9** 'Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel, and he sent and summoned Balaam the son of Beor to curse you.

**10** 'But I was not willing to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless you, and I delivered you from his hand.

**11** 'You crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho; and the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Girgashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Thus I gave them into your hand.

**12** 'Then I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, but not by your sword or your bow.

**13** 'I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.'

## **Hebrews chapter 11**

**32** And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak,

Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,

**33** who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,

**34** quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

**35** Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;

**36** and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

**37** They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

...to this very day. And let us not forget what our Lord has done...

## **Philippians chapter 2**

**6** who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

**7** but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

**8** Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

**9** For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

**10** so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

**11** and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

#### **Joshua chapter 24**

**14** "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

**15** "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were 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."

Whom shall you serve? [WE WILL SERVE THE LORD]

But as Joshua pointed out, God is perfectly holy; altogether without sin. How can we possibly serve such a God? Our own best efforts are as dirty rags. That is why we need to be washed by Christ's blood—the perfect sacrifice, but we must also avoid cheapening grace by doing whatever we desire, then repenting come Sunday. That is NOT serving God. That is serving self. The grace we are given not only washes away past sins, but also empowers us to resist the temptation to sin again. If we fail to make use of that grace, then we are leaving half of God's offer on the table.

Also, you may have noticed that Joshua instructed the Israelites in light of their declaration, which was...[WE WILL SERVE THE LORD]...to get rid of their foreign gods. In other words, Joshua was saying, choose to whom you will be loyal. Pick

a team. You can't play for the Red Sox and the Yankees, so you must choose. God is not only holy, He is also loyal; and He expects the same out of us. Our relationship with Christ must come first! Not family, not country, not our jobs, not the Broncos. Is Christ first in your life? [WE WILL SERVE THE LORD] Prove it. Prove it by how you spend your time. Prove it by how you spend your money. Prove it by turning your "I should" into "I will" into "I just did".

You won't get it perfectly right. None of us do. Sometimes we drop the ball, or we think we are running one play, when we are really running another. It happens. Dust yourself off—which is the worldly way of saying *pray*—and get back in the game; because what really matters is that you are playing for the right team. And hopefully over time, you will notice progress. You become a better player. You fall for Satan's traps less often. You actually listen to your eternal coach. And in this game, you recruit more players.

My sermon today has little to add to what I quoted earlier in Joshua, Hebrews, and Philippians. I can't improve upon it. Just as in Joshua's farewell address to his people, we still today must choose where our loyalty lies. And as Joshua made clear to the Israelites, choosing Yahweh isn't a commitment to be taken lightly. I

used a sports metaphor because we can all understand that, but being a follower of Christ is of far more consequence than a mere game. Though you probably don't have idols of foreign gods about your house, you may have divided loyalties without even knowing it. You probably only hear the Word of God preached once a week at church, but you are likely getting the word of the media preached to you daily. Which fills your head and heart more, I wonder? Do you think Jesus is the answer, or will our salvation come from the right Congress, President, and Supreme Court? I feel I need to address this because now, more than ever, Christians in America are abandoning Christ in favor of their politics. I cannot ignore this hypocrisy within the Church, and even if I did, the world won't. Those who are looking at the Church from the outside expect better of us. Do you find yourself making excuses for the behavior of your person that five years ago you would have condemned in someone else? As members of Christ's church on earth, we cannot defend sinful behavior, no matter who it comes from—a friend, a favorite actor, or a leader from your political party. Sin is sin, and our God is holy. Our Christian beliefs don't end at the ballot box, folks. I know the mid-term election is still a few months off, and maybe you aren't even planning on voting, but if you do, here's a free tip: vote for a Joshua. Whenever possible, support someone who lives a godly life. You shouldn't have to plug your nose when you

vote. Of course, we can be deceived. Many people look good on the outside, while the inside is rotten. But part of choosing to serve the Lord is doing so IN EVERY AREA OF YOUR LIFE—even your politics. And in case you are wondering, God doesn't have a political party. All parties are flawed—deeply flawed. But that doesn't excuse us from making bad decisions when we vote, or worse yet, ungodly decisions. We answer to God for every decision we make, including who we vote for.

I understand that voting decisions are complicated, and you may vote for someone based primarily on their policy positions. If so, fine. Just don't make excuses for their sinful behavior. Don't lose your integrity over a politician who loses their's.

Am I meddling? Yes. Am I right? Yes. We have chosen to serve the Lord with all that we are, and in all that we do. That is as political as it gets. The Romans understood that. Why do you think they persecuted Christians so? The same goes for North Korea and China today. We say the press holds our leaders accountable, but what would happen if Christians did that? I think American politics is in the mess it is, partly because we have failed to do just that. God

didn't give the promised land to a bunch of people so they could serve Him half-heartedly. He doesn't offer us an eternal kingdom for anything less. And He doesn't offer his own flesh and blood at the Eucharist so that we can partake with no more concern than we would eating a Big Mac. If Joshua were standing right here today, he would remind us that the Lord offered us His all, so how can we do any less in return? Choose whom you shall serve.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.