

Living in Canaan
November 21, 2021
Joshua 24:14-33

Clint Pressley

***14****“Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.****15****And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond 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.”*

***16****Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods,****17****for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed.****18****And the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”*

***19****But Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins.****20****If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.”****21****And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the Lord.”****22****Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.”****23****He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel.”****24****And the people said to Joshua, “The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey.”****25****So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem.****26****And 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 terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.****27****And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.”****28****So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.****29****After these things Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being 110 years old.****30****And they buried him in his own inheritance at Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash.*

***31****Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel.*

***32****As for the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem, in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money.[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua+24%3A14-33&version=ESV#fen-ESV-6509a)*] It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph.*

***33****And Eleazar the son of Aaron died, and they buried him at Gibeah, the town of Phinehas his son, which had been given him in the hill country of Ephraim.*

*(Pastor prays)*

We started in the book of Joshua back in May, made it through the summertime, into the Fall and now we're headed into Winter. We're almost done. We have been six, maybe seven, months in the book of Joshua. If you are visiting with us, you are coming in as we're wrapping it up. This is the very last sermon in the book of Joshua. This Joshua, this deliverer in the Old Testament, was pointing us to the right, true and better Joshua, Jesus. Jesus, who doesn’t just deliver us out of bad situations; He is the deliverer who delivers us from the wrath of God.

Joshua wraps up in such a way that it is unceremonious. I mean, just look at the rest of the chapter. At 110 years old, Joshua dies, and in verse 30 they buried him. And in verse 31, it gives a testimony of his life. The writer tells us that Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, and they had known all the work the Lord did for Israel. Joshua stands in front of his people at the end of his life and gives a speech. These people are going into a foreign land. They're going into Canaan. They will be living in a place they don't belong. The Amorites are still in the land, and they had those fertility gods and goddesses that would be such a temptation for the flesh. Joshua stands them up and says, “Look, you are going into a place where you don't belong. You know the report is that it is a land of milk and honey but you don't get the taste much of that milk and honey. It's a land that looks good but it's bad for your soul.” Joshua knew what some of you people know. Living in the promised land is hard. We have this day set aside, the Lord’s day, where we can come together and have our souls ministered to and healed. It’s where we focus on the grace of God found in Jesus. But when you're out there in the world, you're at school or you’re at work, or you're even working at home, that world is a hard place to be. Living as a believer in and follower of Jesus, in this world, let's just say this country or just push it to say, in this city, it’s hard to do. The people you work with and are close to, they don't believe like you do. In fact, not only do they not believe like you, they think your belief is strange or maybe even judgmental.

Men and women are voted into and then sworn into high office here in the United States of America. And when they take an oath, they put their hands on a Bible. Just pick your President. If they knew what was in that book, they would take their hand off that Bible. Whenever you open up that book, you have the words of God.

But we live in a world that does not love the God of the Bible. We live in a world that doesn't believe like you believe and doesn’t understand what you believe and doesn’t even know why you believe like you believe. You feel that on a daily basis. If that's the case, then, Joshua stands in front of the people going into the Promised Land and says that you can live with joy in a world that hates your God.

So if I've got a theme that's running through this sermon, it is…

**Living With Joy in a World that Hates Our God.**

How do we do that? How do we live, how do you get up tomorrow morning and go to your place of work and still have the joy of the Lord as your strength? I think there are couple of things that Joshua gives us. Let's go through them pretty quickly. Here's the first one.

**We count on grace**

The word “grace” ought to be the dominant theme when it comes to your understanding of Christianity. Where did you get that idea of grace? You see that one word. “Therefore.” Anytime you see that word ”therefore,” you need to see what it is following. The word “therefore” is dependent on what came before it. In other words, he's made an argument in verses 1-13 and now he is saying, based on that argument, “therefore.” What is that argument? That argument is grace. In verses 1-13, Joshua is just giving, over and over, God's good grace to His people, God's good provision to His people, God's good deliverance of His people, God's good protection of His people. All of it.

You go back and read the story of Joshua and how God has dealt with His people. Not just in the New Testament but in the Old Testament, you see how God deals with His people. He did it in grace. How do you understand salvation? In fact, I'll press even further. If you don't get sovereign grace right, then you actually don't get Christianity right. You can't truly understand what it means to be a Christian if you don't get a full grasp on how God saved you. It wasn't that *you* took the first step. God *came* to *you*. You were dead in your sin, and dead men don't walk. God spoke and called you out of deadness. What did Jesus say to Lazarus? ”Come forth.” Had he not named Lazarus in that cemetery, every man would have gotten up. It’s the power of God. We believe in a sovereign, saving grace. If you don't get that right, what happens is you either fall over into one of two things.

You can fall into **legalism**. If you don't get grace right, you don't think it's enough and you have to do penance. That’s why we need the Protestant Reformation. Because the Roman Catholic Church had fallen over into legalists, doing penance. So if you don't get grace right what happens is you feel like you have to constantly earn the forgiveness of God. That is a terrible wheel to be on, you will never ever ever be good enough to get that. So many Christians I'm afraid, operate in such a way. You feel like that there's a ledger. On one side of the ledger are the things you did good; on the other side of the ledger, the things that you do bad. And when you get to Heaven, St. Peter says “let me see your ledger.” And if you had enough on the good side, you get in.

Or, I'm afraid so many people hold so tightly to the doctrine of, “Once saved, always saved.” When we should say, IF saved – Always saved. We don't want to fall over into legalism where we are being judgmental, but we don't want to fall over into licentiousness, where we are presuming on the grace of God. We want to count on God's grace given to us at the cross of Jesus. How did God save us? He saved us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

All of us were created in the image of God. But that image in you is disfigured beyond recognition. When I say disfigured, what I mean is, sin has so covered us that it's broken our nature so that we are not just far away from God, we are not just even separated from God; the Bible says that we are dead in our sin.

How did God save us? God gave us Jesus. Jesus who is fully God and fully man. He lived perfectly. That's important. The life of Christ is important. Jesus lived perfectly in a way that we can’t. He kept the law and then at the cross, there's a transaction. Jesus takes the wrath and judgment of God for any sinner who believes in Jesus. Then that sinner receives the righteousness of Christ. So that when God looks at you, you are born again and God sees the righteousness of Christ. It’s important that you get the Gospel right because, if you don't, what happens is you walk around with a bunch of guilt. Look, now you are a son or daughter of God. I'm not saying guilt is wrong. You've got to thank God you feel guilt, but you take it to the cross of Jesus.

And once it's done, once you have repented of your sins and put your faith in Jesus, you are adopted into the family of God. So when you leave here, you go to your job tomorrow, you need to count on grace.

Joshua makes the move down in verse 14. We need to remember that…

**God is God**

You are not God. Who you work for is not God. The United States is not God. Our government is not God. God is God. What Joshua says to the people is, now you’re going into a place that makes you afraid. In fact, the people who spied out this land the first time, they were afraid. So here's what Joshua said, therefore, fear God.

What does it mean to fear God? It means to stand in awe. See the awesomeness of who God is. It’s to have the proper attitude of a redeemed sinner before our almighty God. You realize that what you deserve is judgment. You know what fearing God does? When we fear God, it is preventive medicine. There are things that you won't do because you see and think about this all-powerful God. And you want to be living your life for this God. You are motivated when you fear God. It makes you careful, careful in speech, careful where you go. When you fear God, it makes you thoughtful.

Look, if we come into this sanctuary on the Sunday morning to worship, there ought to be an element of fear. I believe that if more people feared God, more Christians would show up to gather together on the Lord’s Day and worship. The fear of God cures the fear of man.

Now this is going to be important in the days ahead 2022-2023 as our society continues on this runaway devolution. We as the church are going to have to decide: who do we fear? When a church like ours loses its tax-exempt status, then we fear the government. They're coming and it's coming quickly. It's already coming to your public schools. They'll try to impose it on us in a private school, where we stand on gender issues. And we've already made the decision. If we fear God and nothing else, then the decision is made. You need to go ahead and get in your heart the fear of God. If you fear God, you don't have to fear judgment. Fearing God drives your life.

You see, we count on grace and we fear God. And now, there's a third thing to notice in the Bible.,

**Take joy in serving**

It says in verse 14, now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Keep reading this passage and you will find that there are 16 times where Joshua was going to say, “serve the Lord.”

Now we need to be careful how we understand what it means to actually serve the Lord. That word ”serve” shows up very early in the Bible. It is there in Genesis 2 where God put Adam and Eve in the garden and He tells them to cultivate the garden. It's that word “cultivate,” to serve. It's the idea of everyday living. It’s when you get up, you go to an office to work or go to school or you stay at home and work, it's what you're doing there. It’s finding a way to turn what you are doing into serving the Lord. Notice two adjectives right there in verse 14. Serve the Lord. See those two words; with “sincerity” and in “faithfulness.” These words modify what it means to serve. That word “sincerity” means a loyalty or integrity or total devotion so that your life is lived out in service to the Lord; every moment of every day. And you are not a hypocrite. It is saying you are exactly who you say you are. You are the same person at Sunday church as you are Monday at home or at work. It is the idea of genuine, without any kind of guile. That’s sincerity.

There's another word, it's the word “faithfulness.” I had a little more trouble with this word. It actually is better understood as the word “true.” We serve the Lord in our day-to-day lives and we're governed by truth. Truth shows up doctrinally, it shows devotionally, it shows up in our lives, it is displayed in how we live. It's important we get doctrinal truth right. This is important; when we have a clear understanding.

Let's just take the hot topic of debate. Let's take how the world is viewing gender. We should not be ashamed of the beautiful truth that God has given us in His word about what it means to actually be a *man* and what it means to actually be a *woman*. It’s important that we live our lives serving God with a grasp on good doctrine. What does it mean to celebrate the heterosexuality that God has given us in the Bible? Not to be ashamed. While some may say, “I wish I didn’t have to believe like this, but since the Bible says that, I've got to.” But to say instead, “We rejoice in the beautiful truth that God has given us in His word.” Doctrine must invade our devotion time; the time you spend with the Lord. It is important that you are reading good things, interacting with the Bible, breathing in the scripture, breathing out prayer, so that doctrine then is displayed in your everyday living. That is how when living in this world, you can take joy in serving, serving the Lord.

Here, Joshua stands up and says, “you're going to this land. People are going to be different. They don’t believe like you believe. You're going to need to take joy in serving.”

I’ll give you another thing to notice in this speech. Not only take joy in serving. Here's number 4.

**Throw away your idols**

John Calvin said that “every man's heart is an incessant idol factory.” We make idols. We've come up with things to worship. Joshua seems to know that. He said two times right here in verse 14 and then he says it again down in verse 23. Why do those people still carry idols around? Haven’t they seen what God has done? Joshua says in verse 14, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and faithfulness and put away those gods, those little idols that you are carrying, those things that you're secretly hoarding. Joshua said, you are going to serve this God. And he'll talk about that a little later. You need genuine repentance and change. You don’t hold onto for a rainy day these idols that, if things don't work out with this God, you can pursue other things.

This is a full-throated clearing out. This is not a hiding away. This is the radical nature of conversion. This is when you decide that there is one thing in your life that means the world to you. This is the pearl of great price. This is not allowing anything or anybody to get in the way of your worship of God through faith in Jesus. Be careful now. We all have a tendency to hide a little idol, to keep it close by. It could be something as noble as success or having five homes for your family. It could be something as noble as your children. You just turn it so that your children are the things that mean the most to you. If you're not careful then you are driven by a worship even of your children. We all gotta worship something.

Yours might not be so noble. Yours might be more painful. Sometimes pain runs so deep and you get hurt so bad you hold onto that so long that it actually becomes this terrible idol that you worship. Joshua said “you're going to live in the land here and there is one thing you've got to do: make sure there is nothing that is in the way of you worshiping in a full-throated way, this God. Throw away the idols.”

He keeps going in his speech, and the fifth thing he says is where we all get this quote. Now if you know anything about the book of Joshua, you know in Joshua 1 it says to “be strong and courageous.” And you probably know Joshua 4. You might even have it on a plaque on your house. As we read here in verse 15, I'm asking you today to…

**Make a commitment**

Notice what Joshua says in verse 15. ***15****And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond 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.”*

Follow the logic. In verse 15 he tells them to choose. It’s the only time in the Old Testament that people are told to choose. In the Old Testament, it is God choosing. Abraham - Israel – David. It’s the idea of God choosing, but now Joshua says. “Okay, you see God doing all that. Display your loyalty.” And in verses 16, 17 and 18, the people say. “Yes, we choose God. We want to do that. We heard the message and we raise our hand!”

But look what Joshua says in verse 19. Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord, He is holy and He is jealous and He will not forgive your sins.” Keep reading it. Joshua tells them, you don't understand who this God is. You think you can just say, “I'm going to choose God.” You know the pagans living in the land, they could say that. It wouldn't matter because it works with all the gods they wanted it to. This God is a jealous God. And Joshua says, I don’t think you understand the gravity it means to make a commitment. This is tantamount to what Jesus said in Matthew Chapter 7. He got done with the Sermon on the Mount and he wrapped it up. After the Golden Rule, this is what he says*.* ***13****“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.****14****For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

Do you feel like you are standing there by yourself? It’s because you are. You feel alone out there in the world, it is because you probably are. You feel like following Christ in this world is almost more than you can bear. It is. Even Joshua says, you’re not able. Jesus said in Luke 14, when He’s going through what it means to be a disciple, He says we need to count the cost.

What king going off to battle doesn't put a census on his troops to make sure he has enough to fight the fight, win the war? Or what builder when he's building a building doesn't think through what the cost is going to be before he starts so he doesn't get in the middle of it and find he can't finish the project. And Jesus says, look that's discipleship. You need to think it through. Let's just do away with this easy “believism.” This is so far away from sometimes how people present the Gospel. Jesus says: so anyone of you who doesn't renounce all that he had; you can’t be my disciple.

Can you commit to that today? Do you want to live with joy in this world as a Christian? That's the commitment, the following of Jesus.

Joshua pushes it further in verse 15 and he says - this is the sixth point - that you are to…

**Live as an example**

Go back there in Joshua. You probably know this by heart. This has been used in men's events. It is a great thing for fathers and for mothers. It's a great thing for every one of us living as an example. Joshua says, “choose you this day whom you will serve.” And the end of it is, “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” I wonder if you could say that where you are: ”As for me and the influence I'm gonna have, the people under my roof, my leadership and influencing, my sacrificing and changing. I will serve the Lord.” Maybe you need to change. Standing alone. Brothers and sisters, we need new examples. You need to take this Joshua 24:15 off the walls and put it into your heart. You need to live your life as an example.

I’ll give you just one more. Number 7.

**Discipline your heart.**

So see the sequence. In verse 15 Joshua makes the challenge. In 16-18 the people say “Yes, we want to do that, count us in. I'll be on that bus. We want to do that.” And then in verse 19. Joshua warns them that they can't do it.

And then look at the final word of warning in verse 23. Joshua said to them, put away the foreign gods that are among you and incline your heart to the Lord. People say - the heart wants with the heart wants.

Look, that is garbage. The Bible teaches that you have a will and a mind to drive your heart to that which is good and holy and pure and right. Joshua said you “incline.” That word means to “stretch out.” It means you actively discipline your heart to the life of God.

Look, we live in a world that hates our God, the God of the Bible. I want you to live in this world with joy and strength; not fear and bitterness. For God has not given us the spirit of fear as slaves. When you're in Christ, God is giving us the spirit of adoption as sons and daughters bought by the blood of Jesus. We live with joy; not drudgery.

How do you live with joy in a world that hates our God? With that in mind, I want to ask you a few questions. Will you pray with me as I ask the questions? Just listen to the questions.

**What have you done with grace?** Have you presumed on it or have you been judgmental and legalistic? Here's another question. **Do you fear God or have you made him small?** Sometimes I feel like people have God serving them instead of them serving God. **Is God too small in your thoughts?** Here's something for Monday. **How will you, in your daily life at home or work, how will you serve God this week? What idol do you need to throw out? What commitment will you make today?**

Choose today who you are serving. What is the change you need to make to be an example? **Have you been lazy in your heart and soul as a child of God? Do you need Jesus?** This last song of worship is a call for any of you who want to respond. You may want to come and pray. You may want a pastor to pray with you or pray over you. You may want to talk about what it means to give your life to Christ. It’s time for you to make a commitment.

*(Pastor prays)*