

14 "Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! 15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of 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 So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; 17 for the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. 18 And the Lord drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God."

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." Joshua was talking to people who were already believers. They were faithful children of God who knew the Lord well and had experienced His power many times and in many ways. So why does Joshua tell them to choose whom they will serve? It is because, like Moses, Joshua knew how prone the human heart is to turn away from God. Joshua was an old man and knew that He would die soon, so he was urging them to recommit themselves to the LORD their God.

New Year is a perfect time for us to think about our life with the Lord, where we are now, how far we have come. We all have the same heart that is prone to turning away from the Lord. And so, as we stand here at the entrance to a New Year, it is a perfect time for each of us to rededicate ourselves wholeheartedly to serving the LORD, and Him alone. So I ask you today,

Whom will You Serve?

The first thing we do in considering this is to

-I- Remember God's Track Record!

Perhaps the most important word in this text is the very first one, "Now therefore." (At least in the Hebrew it is one word.) It is urging us to make a decision based on what was said before. Joshua has been reminding the people of everything God has done for them. He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. He brought them through the Red Sea. He provided all their needs for them in the desert for 40 years. He brought them across the mighty Jordan River, and then drove out the people in the land and gave them the land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God had done all this for them. Now they were to choose, are they going to continue serving the LORD, or would they start serving "the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell." Let's see, what did the god's of the Amorites do for them? Oh, yea, you are dwelling in their land. The god's of the Amorites proved absolutely powerless to protect them.

The people could easily see how foolish that would be. They said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; 17 for the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. 18 And the Lord drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God."

Joshua urges us to do the same—consider God's track record. That's why God gives us all the history of His dealing with His people in the Bible. It's so we can see what God done for us? He created you with a marvellous body that is capable of so many things. As David confesses, "I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Psalm 139:14. The LORD has saved us from the Bondage to sin and Satan. He died for you in order to deliver you from death and hell. He has promised to come again and take you to His eternal home to live with Him in the promised land of

heaven. Along the way He provides all our needs every day through the wilderness of this life? As we just sang last Sunday in hymn 105, *“He serves that I a lord may be; a great exchange indeed! Could Jesus’ love do more for me, to help me in my need?”*

What have the gods of this world done for you? Absolutely nothing! So may we also rededicate ourselves to the LORD and respond with the people: “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods... We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God.”

Joshua tells us what we need to do.

-II- Fear the LORD!

That is what is missing today! So many confessing Christians today have lost the fear of the Lord. They think God only loves and forgives and wouldn’t punish anyone anymore. As a result they disregard God’s commandments as if He doesn’t care or won’t do anything about it.

Pastors today corrupt God’s word and present a false gospel and have no fear of God’s retribution. They are like Aaron at Mt. Sinai who made the Golden Calf and then said, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!” Then they had “a feast to the LORD.” Ex. 32:5. They made a carved image and called it the LORD, Jehovah who brought them out of Egypt. That is exactly what the liberal churches are doing today by rejecting and changing the word of God. Some deny the virgin birth of Jesus. Which of course means that Jesus was just an ordinary man. He was not the Son of God and therefore He could not save us. So they are making their own god but they use all the names of the God of the Bible, Jesus, Lord, Jehovah, Father and so on.

It’s worth noting where Joshua met with the people for his farewell message. Verse 1 tells us that they all met in Shechem. Do you remember last year we talked about what Joshua did at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal? Half the tribes of Israel stood on Mt. Gerizim and pronounced God’s blessings upon the those who obeyed God’s commands and the other six tribes stood on Mt. Ebal and pronounced God’s curses upon anyone who disregarded God’s commands. The town of Shechem lay in the valley between those two mountains. That is where the Priests stood with the Ark of the Covenant. Now Joshua takes them back there for his farewell address as a reminder that if they turn from the Lord and His Word they would come under God’s curse.

I think sometimes we try too hard to explain that the fear of the Lord does not mean FEAR but reverence and respect. And of course, as Children of God we shouldn’t be afraid of Him. He is our loving Father, who cares for us. Even when we sin we should not be afraid to come to Him and confess our sins for He does forgive us for Jesus’ sake. Yet we should know and remember that if we turn away from God and consider any sin to be no big deal and continue in it then the Lord is still the same God who commanded Moses to kill the people who were still dancing around the golden calf. It is the God who destroyed the entire world in a flood because of their sin and rebellion. Jesus Himself says, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot harm the soul. Rather **fear Him** who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” God is most gracious and merciful to forgive us and save us from death and hell, but for those who abuse His grace and continue in impenitence, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Heb. 10:31 We should be afraid of ever going against God. As Luther said about Exodus 20:5, “God threatens to punish all who do not obey these commandments. Therefore we should fear His anger and not do anything against what He commands.”

When we have the proper Fear the LORD, Joshua also urges us to

-III- “Serve Him in Sincerity and in Truth”

Joshua doesn’t just say serve the Lord, he says Serve Him in Sincerity and truth! To serve the LORD in Sincerity and Truth means to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. The fear of the Lord doesn’t move anyone to serve God in that way. That only comes from knowing the Love of the LORD. We all know that we have disobeyed God’s commands. We do deserve His wrath and punishment, but we also know the Love of the LORD. We just celebrated how “God so loved the world that He GAVE His only begotten Son” for us. We have God’s

forgiveness. We experience His love every day. That is what moves us to love Him and want to serve Him sincerely and in truth.

We all have good intentions. Every child of God wants to make God the first priority in our life, and yet we constantly put other things ahead of God in our life. The people of Joshua's day were worshiping and serving the LORD, yet he had to tell them to "put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord!" So we too need to put away the other gods that we keep around and serve from time to time.

What other gods do you serve? Are there things you put your trust in instead of turning to God? Your money? Or your own wisdom and abilities? What things do we set our hearts on and put above God? What things do we choose instead of coming to worship God, is it our jobs or our pleasure or our families, or our sense of responsibility to others? Don't shrug this off lightly and say, "Oh no, I don't serve other gods." You would just be lying to yourself and that does no good at all. Put away all these other gods that take our heart away from serving the LORD through genuine repentance. When you receive God's full and free forgiveness in Christ that moves us to recommit ourselves to serve God alone and truly make Him number one in our lives.

This needs to be a regular repentance and recommitment because our heart is so easily drawn away to others. At the end of this chapter we read, "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord which He had done for Israel." Joshua 24:31. That was good! They took Joshua's message to heart. But then we read in Judges 2:10 "When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel." That new generation did the unthinkable; they began serving those gods of the Amorites which proved to be so powerless.

In our day too, the christian church is always being drawn to serve the gods of the world. For example: God says that homosexuality is an abomination to Him. The world cries, "It's not a sin, we are born that way. We can love who we want to love. Pretty soon the Church begins to say, Yes, of course, God loves all people. He loves you just the way you are. And to prove it they even ordain homosexual and lesbian pastors. What is that but turning away from the LORD and serving the gods of the world around us? Another example: God describes the fetus as something He created and speaks of it as a person that He loves and has a plan for from the moment of conception. The world cries no, it's not a person, it's just a group of cells. Every woman has the right to choose over her own body. Pretty soon the churches join the cry and say, Yes, if it is for the right reasons, abortion is fine. Isn't that worshiping the gods of this world. We all see the problem with those examples, but we are also drawn to things in the world that are against God's will. We need to be constantly vigilant to reject the gods of this world and to serve the LORD.

Notice that Joshua includes his whole household. He was the head of his household and he made sure that his entire household served the LORD. That is the responsibility of you fathers. We need to teach our children so that the next generation does not forget about the LORD. We do that not only by teaching the truths of Scripture, that has to be the first thing, but then passing on the faith is done by showing your family that God is most important to you by worshiping and serving Him above all things. Lead by your example of joyfully doing God's will every day and being ready to admit your wrongs, both to God and to those you have wronged. Let your children see your love for the Lord in your every day life.

May this word from Joshua inspire us all to rededicate our lives to God as we go ahead into this New year 2025. to Fear Him, and Serve Him in Sincerity and Truth.

Amen.