

Title: Joshua's last word - Joshua 24

Purpose: To encourage us all to rise to the challenge and follow Joshua's lead: "As for me and my house we will serve the LORD."

INTRODUCTION

I remember watching a film one time which was one of those sad films where the main actor gets struck down with some terrible wasting disease in his legs which was then going to slowly take everything away resulting in a lingering death.

But as the film progressed I remember it came to a key point where the man dying, a Christian says:

"You see until you know how to die you don't really know how to live"

Very profound. You can't but help sense that there's a lot of truth hidden within that.

Well this morning we'll mine out a little of that truth as we see Joshua come to his time to die.

Deuteronomy vs Joshua 22-24

Now, I think it would be entirely fair to say that:

- what the whole book of Deuteronomy is -
- this also is what Joshua chapters 22-24 is as well.

So, Q. What do I mean exactly?

Well:

- **THE WHOLE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY** is nothing short of **Moses preaching his full set of final farewell sermons/addresses** to the new generation of the Israelites that will shortly be cross over into the Land of Promise under the guiding hand of General Joshua.
- **JOSHUA 22-24** see, similarly a series of 3 sermons delivered at the close of Joshua's years and so they are like a 3 day tent revival - where every night there's going to be another bible reading and dynamic preaching session.

Definition of Expository Preaching

A number of years ago a group of Bible teachers in the States got together to try to come up with a really good, a really rock solid definition of what is called "EXPOSITORY PREACHING". (This is just a fancy name for preaching that takes the actual text of Scripture seriously and treats it as it is - truly the very word of the living God).

Now it was not the easiest thing to do.

Exposition involves communicating what a particular portion of Scripture is all about, but it also involves the application of those truths to us today and the attempt to move one's hearers to obey those teachings.

This was what the committee came up with in the end:

Biblical exposition is:

“Communicating the meaning of a text or a passage of Scripture in terms of contemporary culture,
with the specific goal of helping people to understand AND (and this is the key thing) obey the truth of God.”

And as I looked at that definition - I think that these 3 farewell sermons of Joshua very much have this definition undergirding them:

- **In Chapter 22** - Joshua gives us a brief sermon directed at **the 2 and a half tribes** and having noted **how they have actually done well** he goes on to map out **how they will be able to CONTINUE GOING ON WELL** by keeping their eye on the ball - **MORE SPECIFICALLY KEEPING THEIR EYE ON THE WORD OF GOD.**
- **In Chapter 23** - Joshua gathers together **all the leaders, the elders, the various officials of the people** (maybe at Shiloh - the spiritual capital at this point - we're not actually told).

For them too he identifies how things are - he looks ahead to the future and discerns that they have a couple of broad alternatives, a couple of different pathways that, as leaders, they could take the people by their own example and teaching:

- ONE is that of **PRESSING ON**
- & **THE OTHER** is that of **SITTING BACK**

He maps out what these different spiritual roads look like - Joshua is not being merely academic about things - Joshua knows better than to be just merely theoretical, Joshua properly seeks to flesh things out.

- **Now in Chapter 24** - Joshua spreads out his teaching **to the widest of all groups** (I think you maybe able to sense, if you've been following through this book of Joshua as we've gone through all 24 chapters, that there is nothing random about the way it proceeds. God's word is always like that. Whenever you come to study any book in detail - you always discover that there is **pattern & progression, meaning & method** about every single chapter).

So what is going to come out even more strongly in this chapter, which will give us the longest and most worked out of this mini-series of 3 sermons - is **BOTH**:

- **UNDERSTANDING** what are the crucial **TRUTHS** that they need
- **PLUS** providing the **HELP THEY NEED TO ACTUALLY BE ABLE TO CARRY IT OUT.**

Joshua's Swansong

Now there is a legend - (one that actually goes back well before the time of Christ) - that has to do with Swans. It is said that the "silent swan" - just before it comes to its time to die breaks forth into a wonderful song - this is what has come to be known as the **SWANSONG** (one word).

Google defines it as: "the final performance or activity of a person's career".

And so **Joshua 24** is **nothing less than Joshua's SWANSONG** and it really is a pretty **CLASSIC EXAMPLE** of the performance of a lifetime - by which I do ***not*** mean that at the end of the chapter we simply give Joshua some sort of **STANDING OVATION** and clap our hands enthusiastically - **RATHER** I think it means we step away from the end of this sermon having taken many notes and having given thanks to God for someone who has been so utterly helpful,

one whose words will provide a way whereby we can take hold of everything that is important.

As I have gone through this passage there are a number of things that have stood out and the FIRST OF THESE is the aspect of CEREMONY:

1] CEREMONY

There are a couple of things which give this chapter its real sense of CEREMONY:

- **THE FIRST IS** - the sheer volume of people - Verse 1 tells us that "**all the tribes of Israel**" are being assembled along with all their leaders one final time - all told there would have been thousands and thousands of people - it would have been nothing short of a mass rally.
- **THE SECOND THING** - (that contributes powerfully to the sense of CEREMONY) - is the location which Joshua chooses.

If you watch TV you might have come across a programme that is quite popular and which goes under the name of "**GRAND DESIGNS**" - it is where people buy a property in order to do it up and then later re-sell it (probably at some great profit).

And **one of a number of really vital factors is the LOCATION** - as the popular saying goes:

"Location! Location! Location!" - which simply emphasizes the reality that **where something is placed OR where something takes place** is really **VERY IMPORTANT**.

No more so than in Joshua 24 and for Joshua's SWANSONG SERMON.

LOCATION - Shechem

So as we see in Verse 1 and repeated in Verse 25 - the location is **SHECHEM** - and it would be a mistake to think nothing of that - because it is the equivalent of someone using what we would call **a "LOADED TERM"**.

So let me just, as it were, "**CLICK ON**" this place **SHECHEM** and see what opens up:

- This was where the **great Patriarch Abraham** first pitched his tent when he came from Ur of the Chaldees.
It was where he **first built an altar** to the LORD.
It was where he **first received the promise of God**.
- This was also where **Jacob and his family** were when they made their **wholesale RE-COMMITMENT to God** by handing over and burying all their household idols that had previously been so precious to them.
They buried them under the large oak tree.
- Not only that - this was **one of the all-time favourite spots in the land** - being nestled down in the valley between those twin mountains of **Ebal** and **Gerizim**.

This was the spot where the whole nation had gathered after their successful defeat of **Ai** in Joshua chapter 8 in order to say their **RESPONSIVE AMENS** to the reading of the blessings and the curses.

So bearing these things in mind you start to realise that when we get to SHECHEM it is like we are walking on **HOLY**

GROUND.

This is a place of memories - somewhere which literally invites us to walk down memory lane and to breathe in deeply the rarefied spiritual air of the past.

Which somewhat naturally takes us on to the second aspect of this chapter - we've had CEREMONY - a truly remarkable event what with the en masse rallying of all the people together at this greatest of locations - so moving forward we now have secondly:

2] TESTIMONY

When you survey Joshua's career you realise that he is a different type of leader to Moses - he is more of a military general, more of an efficient administrator organising the people so that they can effectively carry out all the things that they need to do without leaving anything important undone.

But here in this final chapter, as we get to his SWANSONG - we get a glimpse of Joshua that we have had little of previously and that is JOSHUA as a PROPHET OF THE LORD.

Now a prophet is someone who sits in the very counsel of God and who acts as a divine mouthpiece for the people.

Q. Did you notice that whole section at the start of the chapter between verse 2 and verse 13?

See how it begins - notice who is really speaking here:

Verse 2 "Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: '.....'"

And then we get that whole long prophetic utterance of what God the LORD is saying.

Now we've been very used to that sort of thing happening with Moses - but not very much with Joshua.

Now this whole 12 verse section is nothing other than a TESTIMONY - it is, if you like, a cataloguing of what has taken place from the very first days of Abraham's calling out of the EAST, (out of what is called MESOPOTAMIA), right up to the present day.

x21- "God did something"

At least 21 times in those verses (from Verse 2 to 13) do we read THAT GOD DID SOMETHING.

The opening of Psalm 44 does a good job of summarizing the TESTIMONY here in Joshua 24 - it goes:

Psalm 44 verses 1-3 "We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish.

It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them.

Let me show you a few reasons why this is such a key, such a vital introduction to Joshua's final address to the people:

- **FIRSTLY** - this section removes any possibility, **ANY TEMPTATION**, for there to be a **sense of**

SELF-CONGRATULATION amongst the people.

How easy it would be for the people to **feel somewhat pleased with themselves** now that they have been in receipt of this wonderful land, that now they are a nation like all the others around about - **that they can now feel that they have arrived!!**

- **SECONDLY** - this section serves the important function of helping us have a proper perspective on things.

Knowing how you came to be where you are today is very important, especially when it all comes down to God having done it.

If you realise that God has been INDISPENSIBLE regarding your past THEN you will also recognise that God should, likewise, be INDISPENSIBLE to your future as well.

The truth is, when things get hard in the present or in the future, you need to be able to go back in your minds to an earlier point when you saw God at work - this then stabilizes you and REMINDS YOU that it is God that has brought you to this point and NOT YOU YOURSELVES and therefore you can continue to look to Him and RELY COMPLETELY ON HIM.

So there is a GREAT CEREMONY going on and first off a GREAT TESTIMONY of God is given - the THIRD THING is what I'm calling:

3] CHALLENGE & RESPONSE

Now if the first half or so of this chapter is filled up with everything that God has done, filled up with 21 references to the LORD - we should also notice that the second half has another KEYWORD (if you like) that is just as important and that is the word SERVE.

SERVE (or its various derivative words) comes up no less than 15 times and THAT is the CHALLENGE that is now presented by Joshua to the people.

Verse 14 introduces us into this:

"NOW fear the LORD and **serve him with all faithfulness**. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and **serve the LORD.**"

See how it begins with the NOW - Joshua is saying:

- "in the light of all that God, the LORD, has reminded you of,
in the light of everything that you have today because of God's incredible faithfulness and loyal covenant love **you are necessarily being presented with a CHALLENGE and that CHALLENGE is to SERVE HIM and SERVE HIM ALONE.**"

The whole message of Joshua

When you think of the whole message of the book of Joshua (and today, being our last message in Joshua, is a good time to survey the whole book) - what you realise is that the book calls you to choose the sort of person that you are going to be.

Q. So what are the life choices that Joshua throws into bold relief?

Well they are basically the many different type of people that exist in the world:

- There are those who reject faith and are essentially those still living in the bondage of SIN back in Egypt - those who need to find REDEMPTION through faith in Christ.
- Then there are those who have trusted God to take them out of Egypt but are still nowhere due to their unbelief. They are **wandering aimlessly around in the desert** just like the older generation of Israelites. You're what might be called a **wilderness believer!**
- Now maybe you don't feel either of those categories fit you - but **you might be one who is dominated by sight and not faith**, you might be one who likes to live in the **borderlands**.

You're a bit like some aspects of those TRANSJORDANIAN 2 and a half tribes who still choose to live outside of the land.

You are in some sense a "**half-and-half**" Christian, you are somewhat "**semi-skimmed**" in your faith!

- Maybe you feel that you are a **somewhat more clear-cut Christian** - and yet - you're **not quite of the calibre of a Joshua or a Caleb**.

Your **full-on** in some sense, you're a "**full-fat**" Christian - and yet you recognise that there still a lot of **frustration & failure** present in your walk with God.

And it does seem that many of the tribes that took a somewhat partial possession of their inheritance in the land of promise were a bit like this.

And so we realise that this book of Joshua is issuing a CHALLENGE to us and here in the closing address Joshua himself brings it to a head - he:

- BOTH - **STATES THE CHALLENGE** - verse 14 "...fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness."
- AND - **FORCES THE ISSUE** - verse 15 which reads:

(Verse 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 household, **we will serve the LORD.**"

And this is the great challenge - the challenge that Joshua leads the way personally in.

This was the challenge that we heard at the start of the book:

Joshua 3 verse 5 "Joshua told the people, "**Consecrate yourselves** (which is the same thing as sanctifying or setting yourself apart), **for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.**"

This is the great recipe of all of Victorious Christian Living (and this is how we have looked at this whole book of Joshua as we have gone along).

This was exactly the same CHALLENGE that God gave to Jacob and his family when they stood at this spot some 4-500 years early on.

Genesis 35 and the opening verses read like this: "Then God said to Jacob, 'Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.'

So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, '**Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes.** Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.'

So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one pursued them."

This challenge is **not** some challenge that is particular or peculiar to Joshua and the new generation of Israelites in some way - no it is a universal challenge that echoes through the ages to every generation of Christians and that means us here at The Community Church here in Thatcham.

Q. So what is your answer?

Q. Will you lay down your various other gods and loves and ambitions that you have sold yourselves out to?

And Q. Will you serve the LORD your God with everything?

Well let's see what their response is:

Their response

It starts at Verse 16 :

"Then the people answered, '**Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!**
It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes.
He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled.
And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land.

We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.'"

Now you would think that Joshua at this point would be relieved - even completely ECSTATIC!!

This really could be a kind of NT Simeon song - remember in the birth accounts of Jesus where you get this old man righteous man Simeon in the temple and he finally gets to see the Messiah himself and then he utters the words of what they call the NUNC DIMITTIS (which simply means NOW DISMISS) when he says:

(Luke 2 verse 29ff) "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you **now dismiss** your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Surely now Joshua could be the same - "**Oh Lord, now I have heard it all - the people are going to finally follow you with all their hearts and so NOW DISMISS your servant in peace!!!**"

Well if you look at Verse 19 it pretty well looks like a sort of ice bucket challenge - it seems as though it is one great big slap-in-the-face!!

(Verse 19) "Joshua said to the people, '**You are not able to serve the LORD.** He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins.'"

I can imagine the people responding in their hearts - "You know Joshua, the trouble with you is that nothing is ever good enough for you!!"

Q. So what does this mean?

Q. Why is Joshua seeming to pour complete cold water on their statement of CHOOSING TO SERVE GOD?

Well I think there's basically 2 things that we need to recognise - which BOTH have important application and implication to ourselves:

- **FIRST OFF** - Joshua, though he is now old (he's around 110 years of age) - has not lost any of his faculties - and in particular he has a good memory.

Joshua thinks back to that time when their fathers were camped out for a year or so at Mt Sinai.

Joshua remembers the very same **CHALLENGE and RESPONSE** that was given at that time:

Exodus 19 verse 5 "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession."

And the **RESPONSE** (Verse 8) **"We will do everything the LORD has said."**

And in fact 3 times they make this very same clear statement (it comes twice more in **Exodus chapter 24**).

And we should notice that the Israelites here in this new generation in front of Joshua standing not at Mount Sinai, but rather between the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim - they also make the same three-fold declaration that they will obey and serve the LORD and no other.

Just realise that it was only months later that they built the Golden Calf when Moses seemed to be away a bit too long up the mountain and began to indulge in pagan style revelry describing the Calf Idol as this is your God!!

So very clearly Joshua knows that words alone are CHEAP.

Good intentions alone are easily come by and easily disposed of!!

Just as James in the NT says FAITH when not accompanied by WORKS is no use!!

Joshua looks for actions to accompany their promised obedience.

What is interesting to note is that, unlike Jacob and his family, there is no giving up of their household idols and golden trinkets etc.

So that's the **FIRST THING** that is a rather necessary **SOBERING STATEMENT** - "You are not able to serve the

LORD." Joshua is **puncturing** their **EASY BELIEVISM** - he is bringing them down into reality and not letting them get away with just lofty and pious words that will not bear any weight upon deeper inspection.

And maybe that's you this morning - maybe you all too easily would sing the words of hymns like: "**All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give...**" and perhaps like Joshua we need to **inject a HEALTHY DOSE OF SCEPTICISM into our sentiments.**

- **THE SECOND THING** that is particularly important for us to consider is a lesson that we learned right towards the start of the book when Israel first crossed over the Jordan into the land.

You will recall that they built two stone monuments at that time.

- they took 12 stones out of the river and placed them at Gilgal to remind them that God had taken them across the Jordan.

- they also built another monument in the middle of the river.

Q. Now why did they do that?

Well as we said at the time

- it was to remind them that going into the land required them to go down into death

- putting that in NT clothes - the old life must go down into death so that we might come up in Christ and live a new life in his strength and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

You see it is a terrible mistake to think that now we have been saved by Christ - the rest is up to us.

It is a mistake to say - Christ gives us Salvation (that is Justification)

And now we must take over and produce our Sanctification, bring out our wonderful Obedience and a fruitful life.

Let me just try and be a bit clear here what I am saying because I realise it would not be hard to mis-hear what I am saying.

We cannot do it

Let me try and clarify with a few short & crisp NT verses:

Take [Galatians 3 verses 2- 3](#):

"I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by (mere) **human effort**?"

or take [Romans 8 verse 13](#):

"... if you live **according to the sinful nature**, you will die;
but if **by the Spirit** you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,..."

one final connected pair - [Galatians again - this time chapter 5 verse 16 and then verses 24&25](#):

" So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

" Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.
Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

So we need to be very clear about this - it is not, it is never good old HUMAN RESOLVE that gives us the power to live a life of obedience - it is the power of the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ who enables us to change - our responsibility in this is to daily die to self, to daily keep in step with the Spirit, daily repenting of any known sin so that the Spirit will not become grieved, quenched and silent.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude and wrap up this book of Joshua:

This series of messages - working through Joshua (many times just a chapter at a time) has been all to do with VICTORIOUS LIVING - Living out the Christian Life in FULNESS.

And here at the very end (Joshua 24) we have ONE FINAL CLARION CALL TO THAT FULNESS.

Joshua's final end, his passing, is no big deal - he goes out wonderfully BECAUSE long ago:

- he learned to die
- he learned to die daily
 - he went down into the Jordan
 - died to his own power
 - to his own strength
 - to his own ability

AND THUS HE KNEW LIFE.

Let me end this message, this series with the words of Paul and then the words of Jesus:

Paul: (Galatians 2 verse 20)

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I that live but Christ that lives in me."

Jesus: (Matthew 16 verses 24-25)

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.'"

A call to DIE - yes

A call to VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIVING - too

AMEN