

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Last Words: The Last Words of Joshua

Good morning. We come to the second in our series on "Last Words". Last week we considered the "Last Words of Moses". God willing in the following two weeks we will consider "The Last Words of David" and "The Last Words of Paul".

This week we are going to consider the "Last Words of Joshua". Joshua 23:1-24:33 is devoted to the final communication that Joshua had for the nation of Israel. The verses that we are going to consider today come from Joshua 24:14-31. These verses are the conclusion of Joshua's final words to the nation.

Joshua 23:1 sets the scene for the last words, *"Now it came to pass, a long time after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age. And Joshua called for all Israel."*

Joshua had been the apprentice to Moses and he was one of the two faithful spies who, at the beginning of Israel's wilderness journey, had searched out the land (see Numbers 13:1-14:10). Joshua learned how to handle the people and he had observed their tendency to be discouraged easily. He noticed that they had a fickleness as to their loyalty to God and they were a whinging people who targeted Moses with their complaints. When a successor was required to replace Moses God selected Joshua. Joshua had proved himself faithful. Joshua was fully aware of the challenge that God had called him to.

So it was that Joshua led the people across the river Jordan (See Joshua 3:1-17), led them in victorious battles and was instrumental in dividing the land between the various tribes of Israel. Consistent with his faithfulness to God Joshua must close his earthly journey with important words to this people. Let us now turn to Joshua 24:14-31 for his final concluding words.

### Joshua gives the people a choice

Let us read Joshua 24:14-15, *"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! 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."*

Joshua brings out some remarkable statements which highlight how far the Israelite nation was from their God. Their fathers worshipped idols in Egypt and the expression "the River" may imply that some still clung to idols which originated from Ur of the Chaldees from where Abraham had been called to leave (See Genesis 12:1). Alternatively "the River" may apply to Jordan. Had the Israelites accumulated idols from their time in Egypt and as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years? It seems that idolatry was prevalent in the nation. Now was the time of testing; would they really forsake idolatry and wholeheartedly follow and serve the one true God. Joshua was not only a man of godly principles but of godly practice. Make your choice because I and my household have already made ours as he clearly states, *"As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD"* (Joshua 24:15). Are there Christian homes in our country where it can be said, *"as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD"*? This is a real challenge!

### The people's response

The people's response was emphatic. Let us read Joshua 24:16-18, *"So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; 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. 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."*

We find in Joshua 24:16-18 a strong determination to serve the LORD and the people list the following unmistakable clear reasons:

- They declared their commitment by stating that they will not serve other gods.
- They knew of their deliverance from Egypt.
- They recognised that Egypt was a place of bondage.
- They knew that the LORD had done great signs in their sight.
- They had experienced the LORD's preservation through the wilderness.
- Finally they acknowledged that it was the LORD who had driven out the nations from the land.

There is a parallel with the above points for believers today. Our acceptance of Christ as Saviour and Lord is our deliverance from this doomed world which is the domain of Satan. It is Satan who keeps the unsaved in bondage and blinded to reality. The greatest sign that we can look to is the cross and Christ's resurrection. Daily we experience the LORD's preservation as we live in a world which is contrary to God. Can we truly say that the Lord has driven out of our lives those enemies, habits and idols which seek to draw us back into our old way of life - the kind of life we lived before we trusted Christ as Saviour?

The Apostle John at the end of his first epistle closes with the salutary words, "*Children, keep yourselves from idols*" (1 John 5:21). John knew that there were things in the world and possibly people who could come between a Christian and his God with the distinct danger that they might become idols. There is a saying that 'football is more important than life or death'. If that is true, then football has become an idol! If a person does not get their life right, then death will become a horrific reality.

### **Do we understand the holiness of God?**

Joshua understood this people possibly better than they understood themselves. I said earlier that Joshua had observed how fickle they were. The people were on a high having experienced God's power to drive out the nations. So Joshua is going to challenge them further as to how deep and true their faith was in God.

So we read in Joshua 24:19-20, "*But Joshua said to the people, 'You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.'*"

Here Joshua may not be implying that the people were lying but rather showing that their commitment has both present and long term responsibilities. The slightest deviation will result in a corresponding rebuke in some form or other from their God.

You might think that this would not be true today because God acted very differently with Israel than with Christians now. What does Paul say to the Corinthians who were behaving very badly in relation to the Breaking of Bread, also known as Communion? Let us read from 1 Corinthians 11:28-32: "*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*"

This is just one of many Scriptures where the privilege of being a believer also implies responsibility as to our behaviour. What was true in Joshua's day is still true today because our God is holy. Sin, defilement and unworthy behaviour are not to be tolerated. God is still a jealous God in the best sense of the word. He is jealous that His people be a sanctified people and that everything about their lives should be a witness to others that salvation changes people for the better. We have a new kind of life to live in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Let us remember that our God is not a God to be trifled with!

### **The people reaffirm their commitment**

In response to Joshua's second challenge the people reaffirm their commitment to serve the LORD. So we read in Joshua 24:21, "*And the people said to Joshua, 'No, but we will serve the LORD!'*" It is good to be absolutely certain of our Christian commitment.

### **Witnesses to the decision**

The people having twice declared their commitment to wholly serve the LORD, Joshua 14:22 firmly establishes their responsibility, "*So Joshua said to the people, 'You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him.'* And they said, '*We are witnesses!*'" For a Christian, baptism is that public witness of commitment both to fellow believers and to the world in general.

### The implication of their decision

From Joshua 24:23 it seems as if Joshua was aware that some still clung to idolatry even though they appear to be saying otherwise. He therefore insists, *“Now therefore,” he said, “put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel.”*

There is a hymn which you may sing or did in the past by KAM Kelly which goes as follows:

*Give me a sight, O Saviour,  
Of Thy wondrous love to me,  
Of the love that brought Thee down to earth,  
To die on Calvary.*

*Oh, make me understand it,  
Help me to take it in,  
What it meant to Thee, **the Holy One**,  
To bear away my sin.*

*Was it the nails, O Saviour,  
That bound Thee to the tree?  
Nay, 'twas Thine everlasting love,  
Thy love for me, for me.*

*Oh, wonder of all wonders,  
That through Thy death for me,  
My open sins, **my secret sins**,  
Can all forgiven be.*

*Then melt my heart, O Saviour,  
Bend me, yea, break me down,  
Until I own Thee Conqueror,  
**And Lord and Sov'reign crown.***

In this hymn Kelly touches upon the things that Joshua was seeking to instil in the hearts of the people, that God is a Holy God. If they thought that they could hide their idols at the back of their tents then it was a futile venture because nothing is hidden from God who sees all things (see Hebrews 4:13). Finally, their hearts needed to be broken and let God as Conqueror be truly Lord and Sovereign. It is just the same today for Christians.

### They are still committed

Once again the people respond in a very positive way. Joshua 24:24 states, *“And the people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!”*

Although the people express their determination to serve we should notice there is no commitment to put away those idols that Joshua has mentioned. What we say must correspond to how we live. Very often it is easy to voice opinions and commitment but the challenge is to back up our Christian lives by 24/7 living!

Paul sums up that commitment in Philippians 1:20-21: *“According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. **For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**”*

Paul knew a lot about commitment and because he determined to live for Christ then he suffered. Life was not easy then and for those who seek the same path of commitment to Christ it will not be easy today. Let us read of some of those things that Paul endured for Christ in his life of service. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 he states, *“In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.”*

In our country we may not experience this level of hostility, but there is some persecution. If we consider the whole world then Paul's experiences will be seen somewhere in this world today. There is a self-evident truth that the more faithful we are to Christ the more we will suffer!

### A covenant made

It was probably obvious to Joshua that no amount of challenge would result in any change in the people. We might even have thought that Joshua was discouraging the people. But they have stood firm. They continually affirm their commitment to serve. It is now time to document the result of Joshua's last words to the people. We read in Joshua 24:25, *"So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem."*

Shechem is both the name of a place and the name of a man, see Genesis 33:18-19. It was at Shechem that Jacob purchased land to have somewhere permanent to settle. Now at that time God had not wanted Jacob to settle down; he was expected to be a pilgrim. Years earlier, Abraham had purchased land but not for a dwelling place but land in which to bury the body of his wife Sarah. Not long after Jacob settles down, there is an incident between his family and the local inhabitants. This resulted in harsh punishment being meted out by his sons. As a result, Jacob decides to move away. Therefore, historically the nation of Israel had a claim to that land extending back hundreds of years but with mixed memories. It is in this place that Joshua makes a covenant with the people. So we find Joshua is going to document all that has taken place between himself and the people. Let us read Joshua 24:26, *"Then 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 oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD."*

In addition Joshua takes a large stone and he says, *"Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God"* (Joshua 24:27).

It was not an unusual thing for a physical object to be erected as a witness to situations and activities. Obvious physical features are altars for sacrifice, wells dug for refreshment, pillars that were anointed for witness and, as in this occasion, a stone. Joshua had used stones before to remind the people of events, namely the crossing of the river Jordan. Now that the people have fully committed themselves to serving God, Joshua is able to dismiss the people, Joshua 24:28, *"So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance."*

### Joshua's legacy

Although the words of Joshua have now ended we do well to consider Joshua 24:29-31. In these verses, we discover Joshua's legacy to the nation: *"Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old. And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. 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 24:29-31).

Just as Moses came to the end of his service for God, so here Joshua completes his life of service. Notice we have this wonderful expression, *"Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, **the servant of the LORD, died.**"* Joshua was not self-centred and he was not trying to please other people. Joshua was focused on his LORD. Nothing else mattered to him. The dedication of God's servants is not only to be admired in the pages of Scripture; they are a challenge to ourselves. Can it be truly said of you and me that we are committed *"servants of the LORD"*? It seems to me that in a world of increasing godlessness, there is a need for committed men and women to be known as **"servants of the Lord"**.

As I close, let it be our desire to be committed Christians throughout life and our fervent prayer that the next generation of Christians will respond to the call of service to be **"servants of the Lord"** in our land.

Thank you for listening, and may the Lord's richest blessing be upon you.

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