

Choose For Yourselfes
Joshua 24:1-15

INTRODUCTION:

In 1979, Bob Dylan released an album called "Slow Train Coming." One of the songs on that album was "Gotta Serve Somebody." In case you are not a Dylan fan, or in case you've forgotten the words, listen to these lyrics:

Gotta' Serve Somebody

*You may be an ambassador to England or France,
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance,
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world,
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls*

*But you're gonna' have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna' have to serve somebody,
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna' have to serve somebody.*

That is very like what Joshua told the Israelites on the eve of his death.

- Joshua had been one of the Hebrew slaves in service to the Pharaoh of Egypt.
- Joshua was one of the 2.5 million people who were led out of Egypt on an exodus to the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendents.
- Joshua was one of the people who walked through the Red Sea after Moses parted the waters.
- Joshua was one of the twelve spies who explored the land of Canaan and reported to Moses that this land that God had reserved for them, was bountiful and beautiful.
- Joshua was one of only two of those spies who believed that the Hebrews could take possession of the land because God had said they could.
- Joshua was one of only two adults who survived the forty years of forced nomadic wandering with which God punished the faithless people who refused to enter Canaan because they didn't trust the Lord.
- Joshua was the one who led the Hebrews in their military conquest of this land God had promised them.
- And now, at the age of 110 years old, Joshua was anticipating his death so he called all the people together at Shechem and he told them they gotta' serve somebody but they getta' choose who.

As far as I know, my death is not eminent (although it's OK if it is). But I must tell you what Joshua told the people he was tasked to lead: "You gotta' serve somebody and you getta' choose who."

Here's the way Joshua put it:

² *Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. ³ But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, ⁴ and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.*

⁵ *"Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. ⁶ When I brought your fathers out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. ⁷ But they cried to the LORD for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the desert for a long time.*

⁸ *"I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. ⁹ When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. ¹⁰ But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.*

¹¹ *"Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. ¹² I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. ¹³ So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.'*

¹⁴ *"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 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."*

Joshua, an old man, is about to die. He wanted to leave a parting challenge for his people. They had to choose: serve the ancient gods of their ancestors, serve the gods of the culture around them or serve the

Lord. That same choice is before us and our eternal destiny depends on our decision. Let's look at our options.

I. SHALL WE SERVE THE TRADITIONAL GODS?

First, Joshua said:

*Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, **whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River***

That's one of the options before us. We can choose to serve the gods our forefathers served. By that, I mean, we can choose to serve the traditional gods. We can serve the gods of the Muslims, the Buddhists, the Hindus and other traditional gods.

In case you hadn't noticed, there has been a quantum shift in America. There was a time when this nation was considered a Christian Nation. By that, I mean that Christianity was the dominant religion in America and Christian doctrines were guiding principles for this country.

Do you think that time has passed? Before I go any further, I want you to think of a number between 1 and 100. Think of the percentage of Americans who currently identify themselves as Christians.

Will it surprise you to learn that, according to a 2007 survey by the Pew Forum, 78.4% of Americans identify themselves as Christian? 16.9% admit they do not know what they believe or they refused to answer the survey. 1.7% of Americans are Jewish. 1.3% are of other faiths like Unitarian, New Age or Native American religions. 0.7% are Buddhist. 0.6% are Muslim. 0.4% are Hindu. And 0.3% are of other world faiths.

The United States is not a 100% Christian nation but Christians are certainly the largest segment of the religious fabric of this country. Yet today, Christian liberties seem constantly to be eroded and minority religions seem to be given preferential treatment. In some ways in this country, it seems that the Christian majority is being harassed and persecuted in the name of religious tolerance.

I am not an activist who wants to call you all to write to legislators or picket courthouses. But I am a preacher who wants to call you to action. I want to call you to act in a Christlike manner toward people of other religions.

Jesus taught us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. I want you to put yourself in the shoes (or the sandals) of the other person. Imagine that you were living in Iraq, Saudi Arabia or some other Muslim nation. Imagine that you were living in a Hindu country like India. Or in a Buddhist land like Japan. Then imagine how you would wish to be regarded.

Would you not wish to be regarded with respect and dignity? Wouldn't you expect that your religious beliefs would be honored and accommodated? Would you expect the entire nation to reorder itself around your doctrines? Probably not. But you would not wish to be persecuted because of what you believe.

We must extend those same rights to others without, in the process, compromising what we believe. We can treat people of other faiths with respect without believing what they believe.

So choose for yourselves who you will serve. You can serve the traditional gods of other religions. That is an option.

II. SHALL WE SERVE THE CONTEMPORARY GODS?

Joshua also said:

*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.***

The gods of the Amorites were the contemporary gods that were being worshipped by the culture in which the Hebrews found themselves.

You see, it is not just the traditional gods of the religions of the world with which we must contend. The gods of our culture clamor for our allegiance, too. Self, money, career, greed, pride and pleasure demand our best. How do we live to give our best only to the Lord?

In Matthew 6:24 and in Luke 16:13, Jesus is quoted as saying that no one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or he will love the one and hate the other. Then he said, "You cannot serve both God and money."

Contemporary culture will tell you that is wrong. Contemporary culture will tell you that you can serve both God and money at the same time. In fact, the culture has wormed its way into the church to such a degree that many churches now preach a prosperity gospel that teaches that if you really love God and are really devoted to Him, you become wealthy because God shows His love for His children by making them prosperous.

As a result, many people are lured into religion by the promise of material gain. God becomes their sanctified lottery ticket and they fully and sincerely believe that if they faithfully follow Him, one day, their number will come up and they will be rewarded both materially and eternally.

The problem with that theology is that it is wrong. Jesus said that those who follow after him would have to make material sacrifices. And Jesus

himself was poor. What makes us think that if we follow in Jesus' footsteps that his path led him to sacrifice and ours will not?

The cultural gods of money, career, greed and physical pleasure are really all expressions of one false god and that is self. Ultimately, we live in a society that teaches us to venerate self. We are told that we are number one and that we have to look out for ourselves. We are bombarded with messages that tell us to express ourselves, indulge ourselves, satisfy ourselves and gratify ourselves.

In stark contrast, Jesus says we are to deny ourselves. He says that self is no longer to be the god that we worship but rather, he is. To choose to live so that Jesus is Lord and self is servant is definitely counter-culture. But we can choose to be counter-culture. We can choose to serve the contemporary gods or we can choose not to. The decision is ours.

III. **SHALL WE SERVE JEHOVAH?**

Joshua told the people:

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.

Before Joshua told the people to choose whom they would serve, he reminded them of how the Lord had been faithful to them throughout their national history. It would be good for us to remind ourselves of God's faithfulness to us throughout history, also. And I do not mean merely the history of the United States.

May I remind you that when God created the world, He created man in His own likeness and in His own image? Scripture says that man chose to sin and violated God's perfect will. For centuries, God prepared man to receive a Savior. Then, in the fullness of time, when everything had been exactly arranged for the Savior to come, God took the form of man and He became our Savior.

God, in human flesh, personified His will for us: He lived it. God, in human flesh, accepted the ridicule of religious and political leaders. God, in human flesh, was executed for crimes he had not committed...including the crimes that I have committed and the crimes that you have committed. God, in human flesh, died a hideously painful death and was buried. Then, three days later, God, in human flesh, came back to life and showed Himself to people who gave witness to the facts.

We are commanded to choose whom we will serve. You gotta' serve somebody but you getta choose who. Will you chose to serve the

traditional gods of the other world religions? Will you serve the contemporary gods of our materialistic culture? Or will you serve Jehovah? When you remember what He has done for you, how could you ever turn your back on Jehovah and serve another?

In the first of the Ten Commandments, God acknowledged that He is a jealous God and He will not tolerate people having any other gods in His presence. If we will serve Jehovah, we must serve Him only.

CONCLUSION:

Joshua told the people, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." "Choose for yourselves *this day*." This is not a once-and-for-all choosing. Some might like to think that it is but it is not. We do not, at one moment in time, decide that we believe that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of the Living God and then, forever after, have that as a settled question.

In a very real sense, we must choose each day whom we will serve that day. In a very real sense, we must choose, with every decision we make, whom we will serve by our decisions.

Every day, every hour, every moment, we must decide whom we will serve. Because of the great things God has done, I pray that you will choose to serve Him and give Him the glory that is due Him.

INVITATION: #56 – *"To God Be The Glory"*