

It's a No-Brainer! Joshua 24:14-24

¹⁴ Joshua said, "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly and faithfully. Remove the gods that your fathers served in the region across the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if you see no benefit in serving the LORD, then choose for yourselves today whomever you will serve—whether the gods that your fathers 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!" ¹⁶ The people responded by saying, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD in order to serve other gods! ¹⁷ For the LORD our God, he is the one who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, where we were slaves. He is the one who performed these great signs right before our eyes and protected us on the whole journey that we made and among all the peoples through whom we passed. ¹⁸ The Lord drove out of our presence all the peoples and the Amorites who were living in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God!" ¹⁹ But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD, because he is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and you serve foreign gods, then he will turn and cause disaster for you, and he will put an end to you after he has done good for you." ²¹ But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will most certainly serve the LORD!" ²² So Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves in order to serve him." The people said, "We are witnesses!" ²³ Joshua said, "Now, therefore, remove the foreign gods that are among you, and turn your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel." ²⁴ The people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God, and we will listen to his voice."

"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." (Col. 2:6-7)

There's a tough choice to make. Been wrestling with it for a while. I can see the pros and cons of both sides. I don't have forever to make this choice because time is running out. Here's the choice: Do I continue eating or do I never eat again. You're probably thinking: That's crazy. That's not a choice at all. It's a no-brainer.

It's exactly the type of choice Joshua lays before the people of Israel. They now stood in the Promised Land that God had been promising to give them for hundreds of years. *Joshua said, "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly and faithfully. Remove the gods that your fathers served in the region across the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if you see no benefit in serving the LORD, then choose for yourselves today whomever you will serve—whether the gods that your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living."*

Some Christians make a lot of the word "choose." They may say, "See faith is a choice you have to make. You have to choose to believe in Jesus." Is that what Joshua is doing here? Asking believers to choose to believe? Not at all! He's speaking to believers who already have been given the gift of faith. That only comes by the Holy Spirit and not by our choice. The Bible says that as unbelievers we entered this world spiritually dead. Asking an unbeliever to "make your choice or decision" would be like waving a fifty-dollar bill over a dead person and telling them, "It's all yours. All you have to do is grab it. Joshua is talking to God's children, Israel. He's telling those living believers to make an all-or-nothing choice. In other words, this is not an evangelism sermon. It's a confirmation sermon.

Joshua says that if you're not going to fear the LORD then you need to choose between any number of manure pile deities. He's not giving them any viable alternatives to following the true God. Joshua is trying to shock them with the absurd to show them that this choice is a no-brainer.

Consistency is not something we are very good at in our country. Think of how many people will say the “Pledge of Allegiance” who don’t follow what they confess. *I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands...* And yet how many millions will cheat on their taxes in the coming months... *one nation, under God...* and yet how many deny God’s existence... *with liberty and justice for all...* and yet 60 million babies have been legally killed in our country before getting to see the light of day. And here’s the crazy thing—so many don’t see the inconsistency!

But it’s not just the people out there that are inconstant, is it? Many of us made the promise to choose to follow Jesus in this life no matter what at our confirmations, to follow him alone, and to put our trust in no other god. How have we done? Joshua told the people to throw away all of the other gods in their tents. These were the gods their forefathers worshiped alongside of the true god. What are the gods of your fathers that had found a home in your tent?

Maybe your dad abused alcohol growing up, and you use that as an excuse to do the same. You’re holding onto that empty god which promises everything and gives you nothing but a headache. You can’t serve both God and alcohol. Maybe your dad was always at work and didn’t have time for you as a kid, and you use that as an excuse to keep that empty god of work-holism and neglect in your own life. That god promises success, but only leaves you fatigued. You can’t serve both God and work. Maybe your mother was rude to your father growing up. You use that as an excuse to hold to that empty god of mistreating people in your life. You can’t serve both God and self. Is your god failing to prioritize the true God by saying how busy you are? Is your god greedy? You can’t both God and money. What are the idols in your tent?

Choose to follow the true God! Or choose to follow empty gods that Satan uses to lead souls to hell. As Christians, everyone here would say with the Israelites: *“Far be it from us to forsake the LORD in order to serve other gods!... We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God!”*

And you might expect Joshua to have been elated. But instead, he responded to that confession with what we need to hear today as well: *“You are not able to serve the LORD, because he is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the LORD and you serve foreign gods, then he will turn and cause disaster for you, and he will put an end to you after he has done good for you.”* Joshua knows them! He knows that they have big talk and small walk. Our God is not a soft cuddly Santa in the sky who drools over easy lip service. He’s not a God who is pleased with strongly worded confirmation vows when they are followed by weakly lived lives. You have to be all in!

Have you heard the hog and hen story? Both hog and hen were walking past a church and noted the pastor’s sermon title on the outside bulletin board. It read “What can we do to help the poor?” The hog and hen entered into an earnest conversation over the question as they continued on their way. The hen had a bright idea. “I’ve got it!” She cackled, “We can help the poor by giving them a ham and eggs breakfast!” “Oh, no you don’t” shot back the hog, “for you that only means a contribution. For me, it means total commitment.” The hog was right. That is Joshua’s point. There can be no chicken’s way out; we must go “whole hog” for Jesus.

So the question is not will you say you will only follow God and that you will put away the false gods in your life. But are you willing to do it? What's your choice? To say it makes it a no-brainer. To actually do it makes it a little tougher. It's strange to say, but it's really hard to put away the idols we just talked about. Those idols promise instant satisfaction. But they never deliver. Our God seems so slow sometimes in keeping his promises. But Joshua says, "Choose!" Before you respond to Joshua's challenge, it might be good for us to think about what Joshua stated before the verses of our text. He showed them who this God is.

He starts 600 years before and reminds them of their forefather, Abraham. He reminded them that he took Abraham and literally, multiplied his descendants. Do you remember the story of Abraham? God gave him Isaac. It took 25 years just to get Isaac! But God goes on. To Isaac he gave Jacob and Esau. That's not much better. The Lord multiplies Abraham's seed by giving him two grandsons. And that was after 20 years of childlessness for Isaac and Rebekah. Do you see the point. God does not seem to be in a hurry. He's not driven by the calendar or intimidated by the clock. The LORD kept his promise. The great nation of Israel was proof. But he did it slowly. Our God always does what he promises, sometimes so gradually that we fail to see his faithfulness. It is the only way because it is God's way. Every other god in your life offers instant gratification. But in the long run never delivers. Name one thing that ever has! Joshua goes onto talk about how God saved them from slavery. God defeated every enemy and brought them to the land he had promised Abraham 600 years before. In spite of the divided and inconsistent hearts of the Israelites, God's heart was never divided to save them.

And God does not change. There Jesus was in the throne room of heaven enjoying eternity in perfect glory and he had a choice to make: Do I stay here in the painless perfection of heaven, or do I go to earth and endure eternal pain? While we may be thinking: That's a no-brainer! Why would anyone choose pain? Jesus would agree. It was a no-brainer. He loved you there and so he came here. With undivided heart, he served his Father in heaven for all the times our hearts are divided. With consistent determination, Jesus marched to his death on the cross so that your life would start in heaven. He now lives to bless you as you serve him. His heart is still not divided. Neither is his attention when it comes to you. Think of that. You sit down and read or listen to his Word and call to him in prayer. Jesus is not divided. You have more of his attention than he has of yours. At that moment, he has nothing better to do. This is your God.

Looking at all of that, Joshua made his pledge of allegiance: "As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Make it yours, too. This week, do some soul searching about the idols that you have allowed to stay in your tent. Choose to throw them out and only serve the LORD. And that is going to be really hard. Just remember you have a God more worthy of your heart. The apostle Paul said, "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me*" (Galatians 2:20). So, people of God, choose this day whom you will serve. It's time to prioritize. Refrain from false gods. Embrace the true God. It's a no-brainer. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen." (Philippians 4:7)