Joshua's Final Charge

Joshua Series: 18 of 18

TEXT: Joshua 24:1-15
AIM:

INTRODUCTION:

A. The closing emphasis of the book in this chapter is service.

Reminds us of the last message of the Lord Jesus which also dealt with service.

After exhorting the leaders in Chapter 23, Joshua calls all the people together at Shechem.

This gathering was more solemn than the one described in the previous chapter as we find in verse 26 for makes mention of *"the sanctuary,"* which implies that the tabernacle of the Lord was moved on this great occasion to Shechem. The locality was well calculated to inspire the Israelites with the deepest feelings, as Shechem was a place that was dear to the heart of Israel:

- Shechem was the scene of God's 1st covenant to Abraham and of the Promised Land in Gen. 12:6-7.
- Shechem was here that Jacob built an altar in Gen. 33:20 and here that Joshua exhorted his family to put away their idols before they travelled to Bethel where God renewed His covenant (Gen. 35:1-13).
- In Joshua 8:30-35 it was at Shechem where the book of the law of Moses was copied on Mount Gerizim & Ebal and Joshua read out the blessings and curses inscribed in it to the nation.
- Shechem was the place where Joseph's bones were laid when they were brought up out of Egypt (Josh. 24:32)
- Now once again, at Shechem, Joshua, the aged chieftain, formally gives Israel his final charge before he dies and his voice ceases to be heard among them any more.

For the NT believer, there are no such locations as "holy places" on this earth where the God of the Bible would be offended if you were to desecrate it, or where you would receive some blessing because of your personal presence or attendance, but there are places that can and should arouse sacred memories for the believer.

Joshua is concerned that the people would be tempted to fall into idolatry because of the influence of the heathen nation around them. Israel had prostituted themselves before in idol worship and Joshua knew that idolatry would undoubtedly cause them to forfeit their inheritance, so he uses several arguments to encourage them to devote themselves completely in their service to the Lord.

B. Note five things to consider in this chapter:

1. The Chronicles
2. The Charge
3. The Contradiction
4. The Covenant
5. The Climax

I. THE CHRONICLES – VS. 1-13 – REVIEW OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY UP TO THE TIME OF THIS PRESENT CHAPTER.

A. Gen. 11:31 confirms that Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees on the other of the Euphrates – Vs. 2-3

1. The Euphrates is referred to when our text says ***"the flood."*** The flood here is not reference to the flood of Noah's time, but to the flood plain of the North and East of the great river Euphrates. The Hebrew word for *"flood"* is translated river(s) 99 times, "streams" twice and flood(s) 18 times
2. *"Terah, the father of Abraham, Nachor and Haran,"* had known the true God! For we find in **Gen. 31:53** that Laban spoke to Jacob about *"the God of Abraham, and the God Nahor, the God of their father"* (who was Terah).
3. In fact, in mentioning the flood, it is interesting to note that Laban —Nachor's grandson was still living by the *"flood"* i.e. the river Euphrates in Mesopotamia— (the Euphrates was called *"the river"* because of its pre-eminence (cf. 1 Kgs. 4:21; Ezra 4:10, 16).
4. Unfortunately, Terah and Nahor had begun to compromise their faith with increasingly paganized culture and religion of the Chaldeans and ended up serving other Gods (vs. 2).
5. Terah, Abraham's father had taken Abraham out of their original home in Ur of the Chaldees with the original intention *"to go to the land of Canaan,"* but instead he travelled up the Euphrates valley *"unto Haran, and dwelt there"* (Gen. 11:31) **This was no improvement in their spiritual environment as they was STILL in the same kind of environment of the pagan culture of the Chaldeans!**
6. God finally called *"Abraham from the other side of the flood* [i.e. Euphrates] *and led him throughout all the land of Canaan and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac."* (Josh. 24:3)

B. In Josh. 24:4 – Isaac and Israel's physically descended down into Egypt.

C. Vs. 5-7 – God called Moses, and sent him and Aaron to deliver Israel from the hand of the Egyptians.

D. Vs. 7 – Closes by saying that Israel "dwelt in the wilderness a long season." and vs. 8-10 – Rehearses Israel's wandering in that wilderness.

E. Vs. 11-13 – Tells of the crossing of the Jordan and the possessing of the land of the Canaanites. It is with out question that, GOD GAVE THEM THE LAND!

After he Chronicled Israel's history Joshua gave…

II. THE FINAL CHARGE – VS. 14-18.

A. Vs. 14 – Nature of Charge

1. *"Fear the LORD and serve Him."* We NEED to be reminded of the fear the Lord and serving Him by our God given preachers repeatedly.
2. We also need to remind OURSELVES of this imperative.
   NOTE: God desired them to worship Him in *"sincerity and truth."*
   a. *"Sincerity"* – Lit. "truth—completely whole, without blemish." The idea in Hebrew is that truth is derived from stability and can withstand the rude shocks of inquiry.
   b. Throwing our minds forward in time we recall the Lord Jesus' discussion with the woman at the well, in Samaria, at which time He told her that God desired

and sought after people who would *"worship the Father in the spirit and in truth"* (Jn. 4:24).

1) 4 times is the phrase *"the Spirit of truth"* is used in the NT and 3 times it directly referrers to the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).
2) **There is no better source of stability and truth than the Holy Spirit!**

c. If our faith can't stand under scrutiny and the shock of questioning gainsayers (those who dispute, contradict or speak against it), then there is little truth in it.

3. Our **gratitude** for all that our Great God and Saviour has done for us, is doing, and will do **REQUIRES** our service!

a. Israel was given everything any people could wish for and all by God's grace.

- He drove the enemy out.
- He sent the hornet to chase the enemy on their behalf.
- He handed them the land with all its crops, not a one for which they toiled.

b. Our salvation also is totally by God's grace through the sacrificial offering of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- We don't work for it.
- We don't earn it.
- We don't deserve it.

4. **Vs. 14, 15, 23 –** *"Fear the Lord and **serve** Him… AND Put away the gods which your fathers **served** on the other side of the flood* [Euphrates] *and Egypt."*

a. *"The gods which your fathers **served**"* – Remember Abraham's father Terah had indeed served the gods of the Chaldeans when he was in Ur – among the shrines there the principle deity was the moon god.

b. Had Israel served those gods they would never have taken the land, nor would had God driven out the Amorites from before them.

c. They weren't to make the mistake again – as at Ai of keeping some idols and worship objects for sentimental value – **they were to get rid of them and incline their hearts unto the LORD God.**

d. **TURN >> Acts 19:18-20 –** The Ephesians burned their ungodly things used in pagan worship — the price of them was said to be that of 50,000 pieces of silver or 138 years wages for a rural labourer.

e. What kind of gods or relics of worship do you have hid away in your home as heirlooms, stuff you would have used in worship or may even use to this day?

1) Records, books, religious articles
2) **Illus.** Me personally getting rid of my records, religious medals, drinks and smokes —hesitancy when I considered the cost of pipes & booze— thought of giving them to others. What a foolish thought.
3) Let me encourage you to make a clean sweep of all the things in your life that hinder your worship and service to you LORD, and God, and Saviour.

B. Vs. 15– Joshua's example was for them to make a decision and CHOOSE—and CHOOSE TODAY!!

1. The old, sturdy and steadfast warrior invites them to make a choice BETWEEN false worship and the true, BETWEEN the present and future, BETWEEN the indulgence of their lusts and the approval of their conscience.

2. For Joshua, his choice was already made.
   a. He had NO DESIRE to have a good or favourable standing with the children of Israel, if it was to obscure the clearness of his vision.
   b. NO TEMPTATIONS of this world were going to pervert his sense of truth.
   c. His personal experience of a life spent in God's service had convinced him that Jehovah is the true God—**and from that conviction he does not intend to be swayed or swerve!**
3. In days **WHEN** faith is weak and compromise has become common, **WHEN** sense of duty is slight or the definitions of duty vague, it was needed for the welfare of the nation that the spirit of Joshua should be displayed among the leaders in Israel.
4. If they were to maintain God's blessing and their identity as God's people they should be willing to take their stand boldly upon the declaration, *"But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD—Jehovah."*
5. This is the same choice confronting each person in every age.
   a. One can choose to serve the true God of creation and redemption (now revealed in Jesus Christ), or the pagan nature gods of this world system.
   b. Some may attempt, to their disappointment, to sever both as Terah and Nahor had done.
   c. AND some will cling to the old religion, as if there were some truth and benefit in them, rather then letting go and allowing themselves to fully serve the living God.

C. People's response –Vs. 16-18

After he CHRONICLED Israel's history and gave his final CHARGE, Joshua questioned the people's sincerity for he pointed out…

III. THE CONTRADICTION IN THEIR LIVES – *VS. 19-21*

A. There could be no doubt of the sincerity of the people at that moment.

1. The only doubt that is afterwards expressed by Joshua is as to whether their present feelings were likely to be permanent.
   a. The best test of ***sincerity*** is NOT always the open hostility of foes, for this very often braces up the energies to combat, while at the same time if makes the path of our duty clear.
   b. A lesser test is after the hour of triumph over our foes, for then there is no temptation to rebel.
2. **The real test of our faithfulness to God** is in most cases our power to continue **steadfastly** in one course of conduct when the excitement of conflict is removed and the enemies with which we have to contend are the sinister allurements of ease or custom amid the commonplace duties of life.
3. Too often the Christian who sets his sights heavenward with earnest desires and aspirations, successfully resisting temptation and unbelief or open immorality, falls victim to the subtle snares of compromise with a corrupt society.
   a. This is easily seen in the dress styles, types of entertainment participation and business practices used by believers today.
   b. Instead of maintaining a perpetual warfare with the world, rejecting its principles and despising its precepts, the believer sinks down into a life of

shameless ease and self-indulgence, in the place of a life devotion to the service of God.

c. Such a compromising Christian does NOT cast off God's service, he does not flat out reject God, but mixes up insensibly with his worship with the worship of idols, which he professes to hate.

d. Such persons are halt between two opinions—they strive to serve two masters and their end in like that of Israel—open apostasy and ruin.

B. Israel could not just give God lip service. Their walk would have to match their talk. God is a Holy God – Therefore, a holy people must serve Him.

1. If you refuse to separate from false religion or won't forsake the practice of sin, you cannot serve the Lord and be pleasing unto Him!
2. Mark it down—there is NO SERVICE in the Lord's army without holiness!!
   a. Every US Marine, no matter what his job he had to qualify on the firing range. After all he was primarily a rifleman, without which qualification he could not do anything else.
   b. Likewise, it makes no difference whether you are a preacher, deacon, S.S. teacher, children's worker, custodian or camp worker, without holiness your labours do not qualify as glorification to the Lord you say you love and serve.

C. God is a Jealous God – He won't share you!

1. He won't share you with false religions, idols, your ideas or your family.
2. Loving you family is proper and right, but it is wrong not only wrong to put **anything**, but to put **any human being** on God's earth before God.
3. **Matt. 6:24 –** *"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* "Mammon" is money and to put money as well as things money can by before God is wrong.

D. Vs. 19 – God won't "forgive your transgression nor your sins."

1. Their human resolutions would NOT be enough to serve God — they had to change.
2. Joshua was saying, "Israel, I know your track record: the law is holy, just and good **BUT** you are just too undisciplined, too self-willed to keep it."

E. Vs. 20 – Joshua warned them, if you forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, Jehovah will hurt you – judgement will come.

1. **Vs. 16 –** The people answered, *"God forbid that we should forsake the LORD."*
2. **Vs. 21 –**The people said, "no way, you can count on us to serve Jehovah."

Joshua CHRONICLED Israel's history and gave his final CHARGE to them, pointing out the CONTRADICTION in their lives. After a three fold, "We will serve the Lord" (vs. 15, 18, 21) Joshua got them to sign…

IV. THE COVENANT – VS. 22-27; LIT. "CUT A COVENANT"

A. Vs. 22-24 – Joshua said, "Your mouth will be your witness against you!"

1. **TURN >>** ***Eccl. 5:1-7*** **– Illus.** – My foolish vow in Minnesota
2. Note: 3 times – **Vs. 18, 21, 24 –** the people willingly said, ***"We will serve."***

B. Vs. 25 – He made a covenant and raised a monument.

1. ***"Covenant"*** Heb. Lit. = *Cut a covenant* – derived from the custom of sacrifice, in which the victims were cut in pieces and offered to the deity with whom they were ratifying the agreement.
2. There was a witness of a monument erected from the phrase *"statute and ordinance"*
   a. The word translated ***"statute"*** is derived from the same root as our word "hack," signifying *to cut*, and therefore it meant to engrave in indelible characters.
   b. ***"Ordinance"*** refers to an erection of judgement. The word *"ordinance"* is frequently rendered *"judgement."* It seems the original significance was to set a thing upright, as a pillar on a secure foundation.

V. THE CLIMAX TO JOSHUA'S CHARGE – VS. 28-33

A. Vs. 28 – Joshua and the people departed to their own piece of real estate.

B. Vs. 29-30 –Death of Joshua.

C. How long did the people serve their God? Vs. 31 —Until the death of the elders that outlived Joshua – BUT how long was that? – >> TURN Judges 2:6-15.

The Book of Judges is a record of what happens to people who turn from serving God.

<u>Theme and Message</u> of Joshua is that of Victory.
Victory came through FAITH and OBEDIENCE to God.

Our victory is acquired and maintained the same way!
Joshua's challenge to Israel is our challenge – *"Fear the LORD; Serve Him in sincerity and in truth; put away your idols, you false goes and obey His word"* – Choose you this day whom you will serve. The gods on the other side of the river or the God who will not only make you life full, while making it meaningful, he will give you victory that will last for eternity.

7 Oct. 1984 – Lifegate Bible BC – Dublin
26 July 2003 – River Valley BC – Leixlip, Co. Kildare
25 Oct. 25, `09, Eve – River Valley BC – Leixlip, Co. Kildare
26 Oct. 25, `14, Eve – River Valley BC – Leixlip, Co. Kildare