

## **“Farewells and Salutations”**

### **Joshua 24:14 – 29**

<sup>14</sup> “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

<sup>15</sup> But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

<sup>16</sup> 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 parents 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 travelled. <sup>18</sup> 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.”

<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

<sup>21</sup> But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the LORD.”

<sup>22</sup> Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD.”

“Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.

<sup>23</sup> “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

<sup>24</sup> And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.”

<sup>25</sup> On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. <sup>26</sup> And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.

<sup>27</sup> “See!” he said to all the people. “This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.”

<sup>28</sup> Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance.

<sup>29</sup> After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten.”

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Have you ever thought about if the time came and you had the opportunity, what would your last words be?

Comedian Bob Hope was asked, shortly before he died, where would you like to be buried.

He answered, “Surprise me!”

Another well known actor who was not known for being religious, was found reading a Bible shortly before he died.

He was asked, “What are you doing???”

He replied, “I’m looking for loopholes.”

“They couldn’t hit an elephant at this distance” were the very last words of General John Sedgwick in the American Civil War.

Last words - that’s what we have here in our passage this morning.

In this morning’s reading the people of Israel stood on the verge of a new day. The Promised Land had been largely conquered.

Their inheritance and the rest of their lives lay before them.

Joshua has led the people but he knows his days are coming to a close.

These are Joshua’s final words to all the people.

It’s his farewell speech.

And you would have thought that Joshua could have been more encouraging.

He could have been more celebratory – more triumphal:

“This is amazing! Look at what we’ve done with God’s help. We’ve made it – the land is ours. Let’s get on with the rest of our lives!”

Joshua though, he does something else.

In the first thirteen verses of Joshua 24 are a précis, an outline, of God’s action in Israel’s history.

And then he lands here.

Joshua is on point:

“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness.”

What does it mean and what does that look like?  
Well Joshua knows the people and he knows them.

And Yahweh, the Lord, also knows our hearts and knows them very well and so Joshua continues:

“Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.”

**“Choose yourselves this day whom you will serve...”**

Joshua declares:  
“Serve the Lord”

or

“...serve the gods of your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living.”

One, we all have idols.  
Not necessarily ones made of metal, wood or stone, but very real none the least.

We humans have the tendency to take things both bad and even good, big or small, and these things and make them too important, such that we become too dependent on them, such that they govern our lives and rule our behaviour.

At the core of idolatry is loving something or someone else more than God.

It is taking something – even good things such as spouse or family or career or personal achievement – and making them ultimate things.

And what idols always do is they set themselves up as rivals.

An idol then is a rival that is more central in giving you significance, purpose, identity and happiness than your relationship with God.

As rivals they make promises; they promise meet our deepest needs and longings – promises that they can never keep.

They are like our functional saviours.

So what are they?

***“What are the most prominent idols in our world and in the church?”***

Broadly speaking Timothy Keller identifies a number of areas:

**Occultic idols –**

**Political idols** – allegiance to a particular party so that you cannot accept it's failings, or to a particular form of government both left and right.

**Racial/National idols** – national or ethnic pride that turns bitter and hateful.

**Relational idols** – dysfunctional family systems; living your life through your children.

Marriage is a good thing. The New Testament, including Jesus, honoured marriage. Marriage is a good thing but it's not the best thing.

The thing is Christians today, in the desire to honour and encourage good solid marriages, have made the mistake of idolising marriage and finding a spouse.

Marriage becomes a rival when promising to meet our deepest needs and longings.

**Sexual idols** – sexual identity, pursuing sexual relationships, making sexual encounters whether on a screen or in person the ultimate as promising acceptance and intimacy but failing to deliver.

**Religious idols** – moralism or legalism which attaining God's favour through what we do rather than what Christ has done; or success in ministry the focus' on gifts over character.

**Money and possessions** – our security is in what we earn or possess.

**Cultural idols** – In the West it's radical individualism that makes an idol out of individual happiness at the expense of others and shuns God's call to community.

So in essence it could be anything.

It could be our work, it could be how we look.

It could be the clothes that we wear and the possessions we have.

It could be a romantic relationship or the wanting to have a romantic relationship.

It could sex.

It could a screen.

It could be a substance.  
It could be our sexual identity.  
It could be our marriage.

It could be anything.

And when our idols fail us – which they always do – it crushes or embitters us or both.

If it's money you'll be eaten up by worry or jealousy and even be willing to do unethical things to maintain your lifestyle, which will blow up your life.

### **Identifying Our Idols**

So how do you know if you have an idol?

For Joshua it was clear that there physical objects that needed to be discarded.

But what about ourselves?

Mary was an accomplished musician who attended church. Over time the pastor observed that she battled mental health issues that at times saw her taken into care. She gave her pastor permission to talk to her therapist so that his pastoral guidance could be well informed.

Counsellor said to the pastor, in this particular case, “Mary virtually worships her parents approval of her and they always wanted her to be a world-class performer. She is quite good but she’s never reached the top of her profession and she cannot live with the idea that she has disappointed her parents.”

Medication had helped Mary’s depression but had never come to the root it.<sup>1</sup>

Bob Odenkirk, an actor who has won multiple awards, who’s not a Christian as far as I’m aware, he had this insight:

"That's the wonderful lesson of success.

If you're lucky enough to have success in your career, in your life, a degree of success that you dreamed about or maybe even better than you dreamed about, then you're left looking and going,

'Oh, wait a second, I'm still unsatisfied. I'm still not okay with myself.'

Then that makes you go, 'I always thought success was gonna give me that,' and of course, it isn't."

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<sup>1</sup> Kellor, Counterfeit Gods, 149.

## **1) What do you enjoy dreaming about?**

What occupies your mind when you have nothing to think about?

What is the first thing you think about in the morning and the last thing at night?

“Your religion is what you do in your solitude”.

In other words, where does your mind effortlessly go to when there is nothing else demanding your attention?

What do you enjoy daydreaming about?

Does it go to sex? Your career. Your finances, or a person or relationship form in your mind?

Jesus tells the story of a rich farmer grew abundant crops.

We’re told he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

Then he said [to himself], ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain.

And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” ’

His self-talk, his inner monolog revealed that his life was centred around wealth and possessions.

One or two daydreams is not an indication of an idol.

Instead what we habitually think about to get joy and comfort in the privacy of our lives is a better indicator whether our love for God has a rival.

## **2) How do you spend your money?**

With money we all know we have to pay the bills, the mortgage, the groceries and so on.

But outside of that, is our money heading to a specific area a lot?

Is it the latest and the greatest?

Or do we hoard our money?

Or is scarcity and worry come to mind when thinking about money?

The best thing to do is to print out a bank statement.

Follow the money trail.

## **3) What am I really living for?**

And for us, what happens when we have unanswered prayers and frustrated hopes?

Where do we turn?

**4) What is something so important to you, you must have it at all costs?**

How would you answer this question: "If only I had \_\_\_\_\_ then I would be happy fulfilled and secure?"

Is there something I desire so much I am willing to disappoint or hurt others in order to have it.

**5) When do I experience my most intense negative emotions (for example, fear or anger).**

When a certain desire is not met, do I feel frustration, anxiety, resentment, bitterness, anger and depression?

**Dislodging Our Idols**

So it's one thing to identify your idols but there is one further step: You have to dislodge the idols of your heart.

Joshua commanded the people:

"Throw away the gods!"

"Choose yourselves this day whom you will serve..."

You do have to make a choice but simple willpower alone won't dislodge an idol. An idol has to be rejected and replaced.

The question is, how do you do that?

In verse 25:

"On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws.

And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God.

**Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.**

"See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."

Joshua set up a memorial, the last of eight memorials constructed in the land. These memorials functioned as reminders of God's deliverance of Israel and in turn, of Israel's promises to follow Him.

In this case it was quite a negative one; a marker point that would be "a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."

So it would function as a call to repentance.

We need to the same.

To confess that idols that captured our hearts.

Idolatry is an affront to the Lord of the Universe and the God who saved you.

But repentance needs to be paired.

Along with that we need to rejoice – find our joy – in the second Joshua – Jesus – and finding those places where that can happen.

Like the memorial stone find those places in your life where you can rejoice of what Jesus has done and accomplished for you and it won't be just one place but many.

Think of gathered worship, solitude; Bible reflection; small groups; service; a podcast or Youtube video; partying with good friends.

Anything and everything that makes you appreciate, rejoice and rest in Christ.

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This is one of those messages where you could say, "I wish X was here; they really needed to hear this."

The reality I needed to hear this and so did you.

Choose today.

Choose today on June 16<sup>th</sup>, only few days from the shortest day in the year and from the middle of year.

Choose before the rest of the year overtakes you;

Choose today to follow the Lord into the rest of year to come.