

LIFE'S GREATEST CHOICES

Even the simplest tasks are full of choices. Something as simple as having breakfast involves many choices. Whether to eat or skip it, when to eat, where to eat-- at home or in a restaurant, what to eat, how much to eat, etc. Most of these decisions relative to choices are handled pretty much by habit and we really give little consideration to them. Such choices do not usually have a lasting effect, although, in the above example, whether to eat, what to eat and how much to eat can affect your health. Occasionally, we run into choices that have considerable significance. When we recognize these important situations we need to give thoughtful consideration in the decisions we make relative to these choices. The choice of career, how to plan for retirement, how to plan your will, how to handle that time when you have to depend on others more and more, all of these require a lot of thought and planning. The most crucial choice that anyone will ever make is whether to commit life to God through Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The eternal destiny of each one of us depends on that choice. One of the significant decision times in the nation of Israel is recorded in the last chapter of Joshua where Joshua called all the leaders of the people together on two separate occasions to reaffirm their choice of the direction for their lives. In the first meeting (thought to have been at Shiloh) Joshua wanted to remind the people of all that God had done and to call them to commitment to their responsibility to purify the land to remain faithful to God. One of the purposes of our studying the Bible in Sunday School and in worship time is to remind us of all that God has done for us and to challenge us to be about the work of the Kingdom of God. In the second meeting, Joshua met with the leaders at Shechem and called for a renewal of the covenant. Once again Joshua reminded the people of what God had done for them. He also reminded them of the provisions of the covenant and the consequences of breaking the covenant. He then called for the people to make a choice.

JOSHUA 24:14-15 Each succeeding generation needed to "buy in" to the covenant and personally commit themselves to reverence and serve God. This two-fold challenge is there for each of us today. To fear or reverence God is the beginning point of worship; however, God calls us to more than worship; He calls us to be about the business of the Kingdom of God. Attitude and action are important in anything with which we become involved. Part of the attitude or the reverence of God involves giving Him not only the place of supremacy but the only place in our lives. He is not to be the top priority among many gods that we might worship, He is to be the only One we worship. The call was to put away the idols (gods) that the people had been carrying around with them. These had likely been passed on from generation to generation. Abraham's family had been idol worshipers and the people had been exposed to idol worship in Egypt. It is probable that many families had idols in their possession which they relied on to some extent. These may have been as little more than "good luck charms" or something similar; however, they had no place in the life of the believer. Today we might be asked to throw away the rabbit's foot or get rid of the horoscopes or stop doing whatever rituals we do for luck and to rely ONLY on God. When we have done that, then we must follow through with service to God. Service is essentially a matter of obedience in our daily lives--doing what He says to do as we relate to others, to ourselves and to the physical world in which we live. Joshua was a good leader in that he allowed for dissent. He did not tell the people, "You have to do this!" He essentially told them that if it was not the right thing for them as individuals to serve God, then they should pick whatever god they were going to serve. It should be a conscious choice and not

something that just happens by default. The unspoken truth here is that we WILL serve something or someone as our God (god). Joshua was also a good leader in that he provided a good example: "but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The response from the leaders was immediate. They knew what answer Joshua wanted and they were very quick to speak.

JOSHUA 24:16-18 This is certainly the right answer to the challenge that Joshua gave them. In answering, they recited some of the same benefits that Joshua had just reminded them that God had provided. In making a conscious choice, these people would be foolish to not choose God and they knew that no other choice made any sense. Nevertheless, even though they knew the truth of the matter, it is likely that each of the leaders relied in one way or another on some of the idols that were in their homes. They probably had not considered the full implication of what serving God was all about – specifically, they had not considered the seriousness of making a commitment to God. We hear very little of the seriousness of our Christian walk. The need to live a godly life in Christ Jesus needs to be the herald cry from every pulpit in the land.

JOSHUA 24:19-20 These are strange words coming from Joshua. This is surely what he wanted them to say and yet he immediately tells them that they are not able to do what they just promised to do. This response from Joshua violates all the rules of modern psychiatry about helping a person have a positive self image and confidence. Joshua was concerned about overconfidence on the part of these people. They answered very quickly and did not think about what was involved. Joshua's response was right on target. Our ability to serve God is not adequate, we must have help from God in order to be able to serve Him. Today we would say that God empowers us by His Holy Spirit so that we can follow Him. Any time we try to please God in our own strength we fail. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. What Joshua is telling the people is the truth that salvation by work does not work. The wages of sin is death and without God's grace sin does us in.

JOSHUA 24:21-22 After these sobering words from Joshua, the people stood by their commitment to serve the Lord. From the record that is given in the latter part of this chapter, this generation did maintain faithfulness with God. In talking about renewing the covenant, which is what was going on here, there are usually witnesses to making the contract. Each person could serve as a witness to all the others.

JOSHUA 24:26-27 To help remind the people of what they had committed to do, Joshua recorded the covenant and also set up a memorial stone near the place of worship. These were to serve as reminders for the people. We need constant reminders of our vows to God, we need to have someone challenge us when we answer too quickly with a textbook answer as to our commitment to serve God, and we need to consider the seriousness of our choice to serve God.