

“Serving the Lord”

Joshua 24:14-24, Amos 5:21-24, Matthew 25:1-13, Matthew 6:24

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How do you make choices? What are your priorities? What principles, standards and morals guide your decision making? Are you a person of integrity? Who or what do you serve? Jesus said, **Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”**

There are numerous crossroads on our journeys when we should pause to assess our choices and priorities. Joshua gives us a blueprint regarding how to make wise choices and live them; review, reflect and renew.

Joshua was nearing the end of his life so he gathered all the leaders of Israel and reviewed. Joshua reviewed what God did in their lifetime. Joshua reviewed what God did throughout history. Joshua reviewed how God has and is fulfilling all the promises God made with humanity. Joshua urged them to keep reviewing, to remember and proclaim what God has and is doing in our lives.

Next Joshua leads them in reflecting on their life. Encouraging them to reflect upon, count and celebrate blessings. Reflect, make a choice, to serve God. Joshua really pushed them to reflect deep on their lives. Are you truly serving God? Are you trying to serve God and something else? Duplicity does not work. If you choose to serve God then you must rid yourself of serving idols.

Finally Joshua urges them to renew their love for God. Renew their faith in God. Renew their lives by being strong and careful in reading scripture and living God’s direction. Renew your life through worship.

Review, reflect and renew over and over until you can confidently declare, “I will serve the Lord” and truly live that service.

Joshua chapters 23 and 24 reveal the review, reflect and renew blueprint. Joshua’s review centers on God’s grace that flows through the covenant with Abraham and Sarah where God said, I will bless you and I will make you a blessing to others. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you.

Next Joshua urges us to reflect. Notice how Joshua pushes us to keep reflecting deeper and deeper by asking us to make a choice, to choose to serve the Lord three times.

Joshua 24:14-24 “Now therefore revere the Lord and serve God wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord alone. But if you refuse to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.” The people replied, “We would never abandon the Lord and

serve other gods. For the Lord our God is the one who rescued us and our ancestors from slavery in the land of Egypt. God performed mighty miracles before our very eyes. As we traveled through the wilderness among our enemies, God preserved us. It was the Lord who drove out the Amorites and the other nations living here in the land. So we, too, will serve the Lord, for God alone is our God.” Then Joshua warned the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord, for God is a holy and jealous God. God will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you abandon the Lord and serve other gods, God will turn against you and destroy you, even though God has been so good to you.” But the people answered Joshua, “No, we will serve the Lord!” “You are a witness to your own decision,” Joshua said. “You have chosen to serve the Lord.” “Yes,” they replied, “we are witnesses to what we have said.” “All right then,” Joshua said, “destroy the idols among you, and turn your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” The people said to Joshua, “We will serve the Lord our God. We will obey God alone.”

Joshua is asking us to reflect deep, to move beyond a mere statement of belief to a commitment of a life, of service, for God. Joshua is asking for integrity, reliability and wholeness of service to God. Joshua urges us to reflect deep and be honest with one’s self. Serving God goes beyond lip service, beyond hearers of the word, to doers of the word to orienting one’s life around God to founding all decisions upon God’s will.

Joshua keeps pushing because he suspects duplicity. Joshua knows how tempting it is to serve a few idols on the side. What are the most tempting idols for you? Some are tempted by safety and security. Others by success and money. Some by praise and affirmation. Others by stuff and pride. Some by drugs and addictions. Others by negativity, judging, criticism and gloom. Some want to be liked and play it safe. Our jobs, family and friendships can even become idols if we serve them above God and seek identity from them. Joshua wants you to reflect so you can be aware of who or what you are tempted to serve more than God. Joshua knows this means making some tough choices. How easy it is to push God down the priority list. It takes focus to live a life of devotion and obedience to God.

Joshua says our God is a jealous God. Jealousy stirs up in God because God loves each of us with steadfast everlasting love. God has seen over and over how someone or something grabs our attention then gradually our love for God fades as we make choices to love elsewhere. God does not want God’s relationship with you to be hindered in any way. God wants the very best for you. It hurts God to see us hurting and nothing hurts us more than feeble love for God. God is a jealous God, because God hopes that we will always be faithful in our love for God just as God is always faith in God’s love for us. When you truly love, you serve. Jesus came to serve us and command us to serve one another and God. Joshua wants us to reflect. Are you really living a faithful, intentional, committed relationship with God? God wants more than a superficial, one hour a week, relationship. The prophet Amos declared God words. **Amos 5:21-24 “I hate all your show and pretense—the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies. I will not accept**

your burnt offerings and grain offerings. I won't even notice all your choice peace offerings. Away with your noisy hymns of praise! I will not listen to your music, no matter how lovely it is. Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living."

After reviewing and reflecting the people declare that they will serve the Lord so Joshua leads them in a renewal ceremony. Joshua renews their covenant with God, erects a monument declaring their desire to serve the Lord and worships God.

When you are at a crossroads, when you need to make a choice; review. Where have you been and how did you get here? What have been the key events and who have been the key people in your journey to date? How and where have you seen the presence of God along the way? Next; reflect. What things from your past do you need to carry with you into your future? What things do you need to leave behind? What might you be tempted to "pick-up" in the future that could prove harmful? How can you join in, partner with, the loving work God is already doing in your life and in the world right now? Next, renew your life by loving and serving God.

Jesus told a parable that illustrates review, reflect and renew. **Matthew 25:1-13** **"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."**

The choices we make each day to serve God is the oil in our lamps causing our lives to shine with the love of Christ. Little by little, act by act, we choose whom we serve and in so doing we bring more of the Kingdom of Heaven to earth with God's help.

The five foolish bridesmaids failed to reflect. On the surface they say they love God, they show up, yet they fail to have any depth to their commitment. They have little oil. They are not serving God. When they realize their love is superficial, leaving them in the dark, they try to get by on the love, the oil, of others. This does not work for God is a jealous God wanting a relationship with each of us individually. The foolish bridesmaids go and buy oil. You can't buy love. You can't create love by getting oil from dealers. You can't transfer love from idols to God.

The five wise bridesmaids declare their love for God. They have plenty of oil. They are serving God. They are loving God. They are making choices that show their love for God. God celebrates with them their love for each other.

Joshua declared, "I will serve the Lord". Joshua made a choice and remade it everyday, in the big and small decisions. His loving service of God filled his lamp with oil enabling him to shine with God's love.

How you make choices. How you spend time and money; respond to someone who has hurt you; what you watch, listen to and read. How you help others. What you do. The choices you make to keep giving yourself to God fills your lamp with oil and enables you to shine with God's love.

God is jealous. When one fails to love God, when one fails to serve God, then they have no oil, then their life fails to produce justice and righteous living. There is no depth to the relationship. The bridegroom says to them. "I do not know you". In essence where is your love, where is your service. The door is closed to them, abundant, joyful life eludes them until they fill their lamp with their oil, with their love and service for God. Of course we know God is gracious so there will be more than ample opportunities for the foolish bridesmaids to unite with the bridegroom, celebrate the wedding and shine with God's love. God does not force one to love God. God loves everyone. God invites everyone to love in, return however, love is a choice and must be freely given by each individual person.

God continually invites you to renew your love for God, renew your service for God through your choices. God will renew you with abundant, joyful life in return. We gather in worship to help each other renew our commitment to God. We have renewal ceremonies, baptism and the Lord's Supper. We have dedication Sundays where you are invited to come forward and declare, "I will serve the Lord" by your presence, your actions, your words, your stewardship, your offering, your giving of money, your worship, your love. You are invited to shine.

Amen