



Text: Joshua 24¹ (selected verses)
Series: Facing Life with Courage
Title: Part 12 – Choose Wisely! OR “Who’s Your God?”
Date: October 4, 2009
Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

This week hockey season started again but fall is really football season on both sides of the border. In Canada, the CFL is well on its way toward its championship finale, the Grey Cup. In the United States, the NFL is just underway, heading toward its conclusion in February at the Super Bowl. High School football has been going since the end of August. Last Saturday there was a triple header in the football field just up the street from where I live and I could hear the sounds of the crowd and the players for hours last weekend.

I love sports movies and one of my favorite football movies is the true story about an American high school team entitled, “Remember the Titans.” It’s the story of the racial integration of that school’s team back in the 1960s. A white school was integrated by the addition of black students. The football team, now composed of both white and black players, was further integrated when the white head coach was moved aside into an assistant coach position and was replaced with a black head coach by the name of Coach Boone. As you can imagine, tensions were high in the school, in the community, among the parents and within the team.

Coach Boone planned a pre-season camp for the team at a small college quite a distance from their community to try and build unity within the team. But as the players and their parents gathered to board the busses to leave for camp, the captain of the team, an All-American white player by the name of Gary Bertier, issued an ultimatum to Coach Boone. He told the coach, basically, this is how things will run on this team: the defense will be white, “we don’t need any of your people on defense” he told his coach. And he said, in addition, several key spots on offense will be reserved for white players.

Coach Boone stood eyeball to eyeball with Gary Bertier and asked him...

Coach Boone: Are your parents here?

Bertier: There's my mother.

Coach Boone: Good. [*he nods his head at Gary's mom*] You take a look at her. Cause once you step on that bus you aint got your mama no more. You got your brothers on the team and you got your daddy. You know who your daddy is, doncha? Gary, if you want to play on this football team, you answer me when I ask you who is your daddy? Who's your daddy, Gary? Who's your daddy?

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Bertier: [*Bertier drops his head and quietly says*] You.

Coach Boone: And who's team is this, Gary? Is this your team? Or is this your daddy's team?

Bertier: Yours.

Coach Boone: Now get on the bus.

(<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0210945/quotes>)

“Who’s your daddy?” Who’s in charge here? Whose plans will we follow? Whose word is “word”? “Who’s your daddy?”

In essence, that’s the question that Joshua asked the people of Israel at Shechem three thousand years ago. “Who calls the shots here? Who is in charge? Who do you look to for direction? Whose word will be obeyed?” But his question, of course, was not “who’s your daddy?” but rather...

“Who’s your God?”

Or, as Joshua phrased it...

“choose this day whom you will serve” Joshua 24:15

This morning we’ve come to the end of the Book of Joshua and we’ve come to the end of Joshua’s life. What we’re about to read was Joshua’s final word to the people of Israel. He wasn’t asking the people to follow him ... he was about to die and he knew it. Joshua wasn’t looking for them to bow to his authority. He was asking them the question on behalf of the Lord. The writer of the book tells us that...

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel....” Joshua 24:1-2

I want you to notice three things about this opening statement.

First, notice who is really speaking. Although Joshua is the messenger, the message is from God. Joshua declares “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel...” This isn’t “Coach Joshua” speaking, this is God speaking. In fact, the writer tells us that the people presented themselves before “God,” not Joshua. I want you to notice the word “God” because the entire story revolves around it: “God” and the “gods.” Joshua stands toe to toe with Israel and forces them to choose who they will acknowledge as “God.”

Second, notice where they are gathered. They have been gathered by Joshua to a place called Shechem. It’s the first time it’s appeared in the Book of Joshua but it’s a place with a significant history. God led Joshua to choose this place for



some very important reasons and we're going to touch on two of them, one in just a minute and the other toward the end of the message. But remember the place, Shechem.

Thirdly, notice who is gathered there. It's the leaders and "all the people" of Israel. Joshua's audience is God's people, the nation of Israel. The question he asks them later is a question that he is asking of people who are already professed believers of God. Do you catch that? "Who is your God?" is a question Joshua asks of people who have already, it seems, declared the Lord to be their God. Why does Joshua challenge them with this question?

I want to suggest to you that through Joshua, God is asking you and me the same question today. We're here to worship God. We're gathered here before God. Most of us have declared our faith in him. Most of us are active in serving him. But today we're being asked by "the Lord, the God of Israel..."

Who's your God today?

It seems on the surface as if Joshua is preaching to the choir, but is he? The question already seems to have been answered, but has it? You and I, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, have also seemingly answered the question, but have we? Who is our God? You see, I don't think that this is a "once for all" question. There are "once for all" moments in our lives. When we first come to an understanding of our sinfulness before God and our need of a Saviour, the moment we turn in faith to Jesus Christ and call on him for his saving grace is a once for all moment in our lives. But Shechem wasn't that kind of moment. I think it's a question we need to ask ourselves on a regular basis if not daily. We need to examine our commitment to the Lord regularly to make sure that we haven't allowed other gods to creep into our hearts and minds and weaken our allegiance to the Lord.

Through Joshua, the Lord states his case for his claim on the allegiance of his people Israel. God said through Joshua...

'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac. And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.' Joshua 24:2-4

The Lord rehearses the story of his grace and mercy to the people of Israel and he begins at the beginning. He reminds them that their forefather, Abraham, had once worshipped "other gods." But the Lord had stepped into his life and brought him to know himself, the true and living God. He had led Abraham "through all the land of Canaan," right to the very spot where they were standing, right to



Shechem. It was at Shechem, almost seven centuries earlier, that the Lord had appeared to Abraham and had promised to give him and his descendants the land that they now occupied. In memorial, Abraham built an altar there. And some years later, Abraham's grandson, Jacob, also built an altar at Shechem and he had named the altar...

***El Elohe Israel* which means "The God, the God of Israel" (Genesis 33:20)**

And now in Joshua's day centuries later, the promise of the land having been completed, God brought his people to this spot once again, a place that had been dedicated to the true God, to challenge them to choose him as their God.

Let's just stop for a moment and think about God's grace in our lives. Last week we read a portion of Paul's letter to the Ephesians that reminded us that at one time, we too were people who didn't know God at all. As Paul put it, we were once "dead in the trespasses and sins" in which we once lived and were properly objects of God's wrath because of our sin.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved" Ephesians 2:4-5

Once we were strangers to God, "but God..." stepped into our lives and brought us to know him. Once Abraham had been worshipping false gods, "then," the Lord said, "I took your father Abraham," and revealed myself to him. You see, before the Lord brings the challenge to Israel that they were to choose to serve him, the Lord reminds them that he chose them first. In fact, the whole point of the Lord's retelling of the story of his grace in the life of Israel is to establish the fact that...

Our choice to take Him as our God is rooted in His gracious choice to first take us as His people!

As the Lord unfolded the story of his grace toward Israel he began centuries earlier with the story his grace to Abraham and his descendants, Isaac and Jacob but he then went on to bring the story of grace right down to their own day. He reminds Israel of his grace in sending Moses to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. He continues his story of grace by retelling the account of his kindness in leading Israel through the wilderness, defeating their enemies and leading them to the edge of the land of promise. And finally, he recites the recent history of the conquest of the land of promise and how he gave them victory over the nations who inhabited the land. Eighteen times in just eleven verses the Lord reminds his people of what he had done for them by emphasizing the word "I." He reminded Israel...



"I took" your forefather Abraham and "I led him" through this land and "I gave him Isaac" as a son. To Isaac "I gave Jacob and Esau" and to Israel enslaved in Egypt, "I sent Moses and Aaron" and "I brought you out." You travelled through the wilderness a long time and "then I brought you" to the edge of the land of promise and "I destroyed" the enemies who opposed you. You crossed the Jordan and "I gave" Jericho and all the nations "into your hand."

Over and over again the Lord reminded Israel: "I gave ... I gave... I gave." God personally and lavishly poured grace after grace on his people.

Several times throughout the Bible God reminds us that he has chosen us and invites us to respond to his choice by submitting ourselves to him as our God.

Moses wrote...

"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." Deuteronomy 7:6

And Paul tells us that long before we ever chose to believe in Christ, God had already chosen us. Paul wrote...

**"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."
Ephesians 1:3-6**

The Apostle John phrased the choice in terms of love. He wrote...

"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins ... We love because he first loved us." 1 John 4:10, 19

And Jesus said...

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide...." John 15:16

The choices we are called on to make by God are held in his hand. We need to catch a glimpse of how His grace precedes, initiates, empowers and completes every spiritual act which we are called on to make.



The Lord concluded his history of grace to Israel by reminding them of the gift of the land of promise. He said to Israel...

“I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.” Joshua 24:13

And then Joshua, as the Lord’s spokesman, made the appeal.

“Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:14-16

Israel had a choice to make and they made it enthusiastically!

Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.” Joshua 24:16-18

The people had clearly understood the Lord’s message to them about his grace and provision. They got it! God had been so good to them how could they forsake him and serve other gods who had done nothing for them! They were emphatic: “we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”

You’d expect Joshua to be rejoicing, wouldn’t you? You’d expect him to be filled with praise to God. At least, you’d expect him to be encouraging and affirming of the people’s declaration of their desire to choose to serve God. But this is what he said to them...

“You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.” Joshua 24:19-20

Why is he being so hard on them? Because it isn’t the first time that Joshua had heard the people of Israel declare their choice to follow the Lord. The last time had been years before at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses had come down the mountain from meeting with the Lord. Joshua was Moses’ assistant in those



days, his right hand man. The Lord had just given Moses his Law and Moses had read it for the people and the people of Israel had said...

“All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” Exodus 24:7

But within days these same people had demanded that Aaron, Moses' brother, **“make us gods who shall go before us.” (Exodus 32:1)** And so Aaron made them a golden calf fashioned from their earrings and jewelry and the people danced around it, worshipping it! Joshua was one of only two men still alive in Israel who had been there that day at Mount Sinai and had seen how quickly God's people could turn away from him. We are so easily turned! The crowd that welcomed Jesus and sang “Hosanna to the Son of David” within days were yelling “Crucify Him!” We are so weak!

Joshua was right! We are not able to serve the Lord ... in our own strength. Fickleness, not faithfulness, is the default setting of our spirits. What Joshua was doing was challenging his fellow Israelites to...

Count the cost of choosing to serve God

and this morning I'm inviting us to make an accounting of our allegiance to the Lord.

Joshua had heard glib, easy declarations of allegiance before and he wasn't impressed by them then and he wasn't fooled by them now! He was too old and full of years to be duped by the quick declarations of a mob! Jesus was also fully aware of our fickleness and he issued the same challenge to us. He said...

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ... So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:26-30, 33

Jesus used strong language to heighten the intensity of the challenge. He didn't mean that we should hate our parents or our spouses or our children in order to follow him, but when compared to our love and allegiance to him, all else should seem like hatred. (c.f. Matthew 10:37) Joshua didn't mean that God would not forgive his people – in the past he had forgiven their disloyalty and worship of “other gods” over and over again and in the coming centuries he would be called



on to repeatedly forgive their wandering hearts! But he would not merely dismiss their disloyalty – he would deal with it severely if need be.

Joshua was right – God is holy! It’s what sets him apart from all the “other gods.” A godly woman who knew her God once prayed...

“There is none holy like the LORD; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.” 1 Samuel 2:2

Our God is not a “favourite God.” He will not allow himself to be compared with other gods as one option among many viable options. His holiness makes him incomparable. He will not sit on a shelf with “other gods” pretending to be one god among many possibilities just waiting for us take him down and play with him for a day or so. He is the only God and he is holy.

And Joshua knew that the Lord is a jealous God. His jealousy is what is stirred in him whenever his people offend his holiness by following “other gods.” The Lord had declared to his people back at Mount Sinai, the first time they had declared their loyalty to him,

**“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”
Exodus 20:3-6**

So, in a very real way, at the end of his life, Joshua brought Israel back to Mount Sinai, back to the place where they first declared their allegiance to God, and he challenges them to take their declarations seriously as they had not done all those years earlier. And the people hear him and they affirm it again...

“No, but we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:21

They’re serious. They’ve counted the cost. They’re willing to pay the price. And so Joshua calls them on it...

**Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel.” And the people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey.”
Joshua 24:22-24**



And they did! This is the summary of their story at the end of the Book of Joshua...

“Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel.” Joshua 24:31

I told you back at the beginning of our walk through this last word from Joshua that there were two reasons why God directed Joshua to gather the people at Shechem. The first reason, as I mentioned, was because it was the place where God had promised the land to Abraham and the place Jacob had dedicated to the name of “the God, the God of Israel.” What a great place for the Lord to ask his people to declare him to be their God.

But the second reason that God had Joshua bring the people here was because it was a place where God’s people had once before cleansed the “foreign gods” from their lives. The Lord had told Jacob to take his extended family to Shechem and there remove the pagan influences from their lives so that they could worship him with a clean heart. Jacob had said to his clan...

“Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.” So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.” Genesis 35:2-4

Joshua realized that all the while that the people of Israel had been declaring their loyalty to the Lord they had been harboring “foreign gods” in their lives. Now, I’m not sure if they actually had little carved images like the ones Jacob’s family had surrendered at Shechem. There’s no mention of any collection of idols as there was with Jacob. I think the real problem wasn’t that the people of Israel had little gods sitting on shelves in their homes. The real problem were the “foreign gods” that occupied a place in their hearts. I think Joshua was asking them to remove the other gods from their minds and from their spirits.

The very real problem that we face with “other gods” is that while our homes may have Scripture plaques on every wall and a Bible in every room, we can still have hearts and minds that are choked with “other gods.” The pagans had many gods because virtually everything could be a god. There were gods for rivers and crops, for birth and death, for war and romance. The Bible warns us about the god of “wanting more stuff” – yes, there is a god of consumer goods. Paul wrote...

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Colossians 3:5



Paul isn't suggesting that covetousness is the only "other god" we need to watch out for. He's establishing a principle that things, humanly devised things, can become gods in our lives. Tim Keller, a pastor in New York City which is a Mecca for the modern gods, defines a "god" as **"anything we look to to provide us with something which only God can provide."**² **Where do we look for our ultimate...**

- **Security**
- **Meaning**
- **Comfort**
- **Fulfillment**
- **Joy?**

These are things that God, by his grace, wants to give us. But we often "double dip" – we accept his grace gifts but we also keep our options open by looking to "other gods."

Do you look to money for security? You've made it a god. Do you look to your career for meaning? It might be well on the way to deification in your life. Do you look to your leisure activities for your comfort? You might well have made leisure into a god. Do you find your fulfillment in your family? Then consider that they might have taken their place on the idol shelf in your heart. If you answer the question, "God loves me because ..." by inserting your personal faithfulness to him into the equation, then you might well have turned your holiness into an idol. Keller also suggests that a "god" can be defined as **"something without which we cannot live."** Ask yourself: **if _____ was taken away, would I still praise God?** Can we say with Job, "though he slay me, yet will I hope in him?" (Job 13:15 NIV)

These humanly devised gods have a way of finding their way into our lives. The question...

"Who's your God?"

is one which we have to repeatedly ask ourselves. If you declare allegiance to the God of the Bible, know that he is a holy and a jealous God and he will not accept the presence of any "other god" in our lives. As we come to the Table of the Lord this morning let's take a few moments to ask ourselves this crucial question. Let's invite the Holy Spirit to take a spiritual inventory of our lives. The Psalm wrote...

² Tim Keller, Notes from sermon on Acts 19:21-41, Session One, "Entrusted with the Gospel: Living the Vision of 2 Timothy," The Gospel Coalition, 2009 National Conference, April 21, 2009.



**“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way
everlasting!” Psalm 139:23-24**

We’re going to spend a few moments in silence as we gather before God. As we end that time of prayer and move to the Table of the Lord we’ll sing a song that we’ve been learning over the last few months. In fact as you pray, these words might help you to yield your life to God.

**O great God of highest heav’n occupy my lowly heart
Own it all and reign supreme, conquer every rebel pow’r.
Let no vice of sin remain that resists Your holy war
You have loved and purchased me make me Yours forevermore.**

**I was blinded by my sin, had no ears to hear Your voice
Did not know Your love within, had no taste for heaven’s joys
Then Your Spirit gave me life, opened up Your Word to me
Through the gospel of Your Son, gave me endless hope and peace**

**Help me now to live a life that’s dependent on Your grace
Keep my heart and guard my soul from the evils that I face
You are worthy to be praised with my every thought and deed
O great God of highest heaven glorify Your Name through me”³**

Let’s pray.

- **Invitation to the Table of the Lord**
- **Songs of Communion:**
 - O Great God
 - I Will Glory in My Redeemer

³ Bob Kauflin, “O Great God,” © 2006 Sovereign Grace Praise (BMI). Sovereign Grace Music, a division of Sovereign Grace Ministries.