



“Day of Decision”

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We recently embarked upon a new year, and what I think most of us hope will be a new and better chapter in our lives. We mark time by years down here on earth, so when we turn the calendar, we also tend to think about turning over a new leaf. Maybe you’re taking this time right now because you decided that now is the time you will begin reading and studying the Bible, searching for God and His truth. That’s a great resolution, and I hope you will stick to it because it will yield great profits in your life.

Unfortunately though, most of us don’t have a very good track record of keeping resolutions. We like the idea, but when it comes to putting in the work, we easily become discouraged and fall back into our old habits. Year after year passes, and we’ve not really made any progress. Goals are not reached, promises are not kept and dreams are left in the dust. That ‘new you’ is forgotten and we come to realize that the ‘old us’ is still right there...eating, sitting, spending, just like we always have. It doesn’t have to be that way. But many of us could testify to the fact that it often IS that way. It has been that way for a long, long time. I would remind you that it took the Israelites forty years to complete a move that should’ve taken a few days. They walked across the Red Sea and marched out of Egypt in great victory, with resolve to inherit the land that God had promised their father, Abraham, four hundred years earlier. But their faith floundered. The vision vanished. Their march to Canaan became a long and hard slog through the desert wilderness that amounted to forty years. Of the hundreds of thousands of Hebrews who left Egypt with Moses, only two of them finally entered Canaan. In fact, even Moses failed to reach it.

When we come to the Old Testament book of **Joshua**, they are finally entering the land. The first several chapters of **Joshua** are about victory: they cross the rolling Jordan, they begin to take the land, they conquer Jericho...but Joshua knew the long history of these people. Now, being an old man over a hundred years old, he knew he was about to die and he feared for their future. He knew their tendency

to turn aside. So, he gathers them at Shechem—the very place where God had promised this land to Abraham hundreds of years ago.

At this significant patriarchal site, he preaches his farewell sermon, taking them back through their history, showing them how God had brought them by His grace through all of their victories, defeats, trials and challenges to where they now stood. Then, there was a challenge; a solemn warning.

Joshua 24:14-15 “Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Joshua’s declaration of he and his family’s faith and commitment is one of the most courageous and resolute statements ever made. But he was just one man. What would the nation do? He’s telling them that this was a day of decision.

That will be the focus of our study today. You may be like a multitude of others sitting on the fence. You may be carelessly drifting or aimlessly wandering through life with no spiritual direction. Like then, today is also a day of decision. I want to challenge you to make some important decisions today that I promise will change your life.

The words of Joshua in this passage are very familiar. *Choose you this day whom ye will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* Throughout their four-hundred-year history, and even throughout the history of the human race, men haven’t been faithful to God for very long. Idolatry was and is an ever present temptation. Even Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, was at one time an idolater, who was raised in Er of the Chaldees near ancient Babylon. He had to renounce the many gods of his past in order to follow the one true God who had ultimately blessed him.

Abraham’s children were confronted with the temptation to worship strange gods throughout their generations. Whether it was the mythical gods of the Egyptians or the many false gods of the Canaanites in the land that they were then conquering, Joshua knew that as they possessed the land and encountered the culture and religion of the Canaanites, their history would come back to haunt them and they would be tempted to turn to paganism and fail to be a separate people, dedicated to God alone.

So, he tells them in our text passage that this was a day of decision. They had choices before them: they could worship the idols that their fathers worshipped on the other side of the river, they could choose which gods they would serve and bow to, or they could wholly give themselves to the true God of heaven. He said, *My family has made their decision, and no matter what you decide to do or what god you choose to worship, my house is going to serve the Lord.*

My, my, how we need some ‘Joshuas’ in this day of worldliness and conformity. People with the faith, courage and resolve to stand up and say, *even if no one else will, I’ll serve the Lord. If everybody else lives in sin and hates and rejects the truth and I have to be all alone, that’s all right. I’m going to serve the Lord. If everyone else embraces religious error, false doctrine and false worship, that’s not going to*

change my decision and my commitment to do just what the Bible says. Yes, we need some 'Joshuas' today.

Well, when Joshua said that, it did the same thing that a stirring speech might do to people today: it got them stirred up emotionally, caught up in the moment, and to paraphrase their response, they said, *Yes! We'll serve the Lord. Why would we not? Surely you don't think we would worship pagan idols!* But, Joshua knew them through and through. He knew their past, and how weak and fickle they could be. So he chided them a bit.

Joshua 24:19-20 "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good."

In other words, *You say you'll be faithful to God, but if you don't do any differently than you have in the past, after a while, you'll forget all about this and go back to your old ways.* Here is their perhaps even more vociferous response:

Joshua 24:21 "And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD."

Joshua then told them that they had committed themselves to forsake idolatry and to only worship God.

Joshua 24:22 "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses."

Joshua 24:24-25 "And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem."

Joshua took a large stone and erected a monument to serve as a witness to the vow that they had made to be faithful and serve the Lord, then dismissed the people to their inheritance. He died soon after. Well, we need to make some decisions today. So many of us are fickle today, undependable. We talk a good game about our faith and our religion. We might admit how much we fall short; we might even say that we're going to do differently. But we've never in our heart of hearts made the decisions that need to be made.

Remember before the famous showdown at Mt. Carmel, Elijah the prophet gathered the people together and made a statement similar to Joshua's.

1 Kings 18:21 "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word."

Are you *halting between two opinions* today? Do you KNOW what's right, but you've not committed to DO right? There are a lot of people who fall into that category. There ARE things that require great decisions. As we stand on the precipice of a new year filled with new opportunities and a clean sheet on which to write, it is a great time to make these decisions. It is truly a day of decision for you.

(1) IT IS TIME TO DECIDE TO OBEY GOD.

Luke 6:46 “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

There are many people who call Jesus ‘Lord’ but they don’t really submit to Him as Lord. I know a man who, until a few years ago, would argue with everyone he could that a person had to be baptized into Christ to receive the remission of sins (**Acts 2:38**). He knew and believed that that’s what the Bible says and he would tell you that. He would tell you that if you aren’t following the Bible in worship and in your life, you’re wasting your time calling yourself a Christian. Yet, he himself had never been baptized. He himself was not serving the Lord within the church...until a few years ago when he finally made up his mind and was immersed into Christ.

There are a lot of people like that. There are also those who, like Israel of old like to claim God as their Father. They like to claim Jesus is their Savior—but they won’t make Him their Lord. Maybe they like to think of Jesus as their Friend—but not their Master. But good thoughts about Jesus won’t save you, my friend. Praying or crying out to Jesus won’t save you. Owning a Bible or displaying a cross in your home or on your clothing doesn’t save you. God’s grace through obedient faith saves you.

So many want to live life on their terms. They want to remain a part of the world, hold on to a sinful practice or lifestyle. They don’t really want to leave the life of sin. Yet somehow, they think that Christ is going to save them. They say, *I believe in Jesus*. Not if they’re not going to obey Him. That’s the simple fact of the matter.

Hebrews 5:9 “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;”

That verse does NOT say that *he is the author of salvation to all them that believe that what He says is true*. Rather, *to all them that obey Him*. Have you been baptized into Christ? Are you a faithful and dependable worker in His church? Are you gathering with the church to worship Him according to the scriptures, faithfully, stedfastly, like the Bible says Christians are to do upon the first day of the week? If not, why don’t you finally decide and make up your mind to obey the Lord today? Submit to Him. If you really believe that He is who He claims to be—and the Bible says that He is—start obeying Him. Resolve today to step out and obey the gospel and begin living the life that He calls you to live.

(2) IT’S TIME TO DECIDE TO GIVE UP SIN.

The Bible teaches that sin CAN be left behind. Sin CAN be conquered through Christ. The Bible also makes repentance of sin a requirement or prerequisite to forgiveness. In fact, in **Romans 6**, Paul illustrates how the Christian was forgiven, made free from sin in baptism and raised to a new life in Christ. In **Romans 6:3-6**, he beautifully illustrates that. Then he says this:

Romans 6:12 “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body...”

What does he mean? How does sin reign within a person? All of us have been guilty of sin.

I John 1:8 “f we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

So, what is the difference in *having sin* and *letting sin reign in our bodies*? I'll illustrate it like this: There is a big difference in a thief who breaks into your home, and a person you invite inside. If a burglar sneaks into your home, ransacks the place and steals your belongings, you didn't want him there. You may have unknowingly left the door unlocked or a window open, but you certainly didn't turn down the covers in the guest room for him. And once it happens, you'll certainly be more vigilant to keep him out in the future.

Well, sin is an intruder. It is an interloper in the life of a Christian. But sin dwells in the heart and life of a sinner. The Christian has evicted the devil from his heart and life. There are many people who profess to be Christians, but they have never evicted sin from their lives. They never really repented of their sin and committed themselves to live a godly and holy life. Consequently, Christ doesn't dwell in such a one's heart by faith because sin never left and the Lord is not going to live in a dirty house.

I Corinthians 6:9-10 "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

Are there sins in your life that you refuse to repent of? Have they even become destructive and debilitating habits and addictions? I've got good news for you, my friend. Those chains can be broken today. Jesus holds the keys and He will empower you to overcome those things. But you've got to yield to Him in repentance and obedience. You've got to make up your mind to give it up and let Christ change your life.

We can read of some people practicing things they had no business being involved in in **Acts 19**. When they were finally convicted of their sinful ways, the Bible says this:

Acts 19:18-20 "And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."

Now, that's repentance. That's what you call a day of decision for those people.

(3) IT'S TIME TO PUT THE CHURCH AND THE LORD JESUS FIRST.

Jesus made that imperative.

Matthew 6:33 "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

These things referring to the *necessities and temporal things of life*. He says to put the kingdom first in your life. Seek God's kingdom and righteousness first and foremost, and things of this physical life will take care of themselves. Have you become derelict in your duty to the kingdom of the Lord? Have you shirked your responsibility to the church, to the cause of Christ? Are you, as we sometimes say "*out of duty*?" Have you allowed your job or your family, your goals and dreams in life, maybe something as simple as recreation or worldly interests to crowd out the things that are far more important? It's very

easy to do. In fact, Jesus once said that the thorns of worldliness and earthly cares will choke the seed in the heart of a Christian until it dies altogether.

Why don't you get back to where you ought to be? Stop saying *a better time* or *when it's easier* or *when it's more convenient* because friend, that will never happen. There will never be a more opportune moment in your life to make a decision that will impact the rest of your life and where you will spend eternity than right now. Today. *How long halt ye between two opinions?* Elijah asked. Joshua said, *Choose ye this day whom you will serve.*

Sometimes getting our priorities straight is a real challenge. Some of the things on our "Important Things in Life" list are very necessary. Cares of this life are not inherently evil. For example, it's necessary that a man work for a living. The Bible says *that if a man won't provide for his family, he is worse than an infidel (I Timothy 5:8)*. It also says that *if a man won't work, neither should he eat (II Thessalonians 3:10)*. We are commanded to work for what we have, for what we eat. Education is also a wonderful thing. There's nothing wrong with recreation or relaxation. Or enjoying a ball game or hiking, fishing or hunting. There's nothing wrong with any of those things necessarily. But how often and in how many lives do those things come between a person and their service to the Lord?

If you begin to approach life by saying that you're just going to try to rearrange some of these things, cutting down on this or that a little so you can squeeze in a little time for this or that, and if you treat the Lord and your duty to God that way (including living the Christian life, attending worship and studying the Bible, etc.), let me tell you something: you will never be successful. You'll always be a failure in trying to live the Christian life. You are not going to be faithful. There's an old illustration that puts it so well. It is said that there was a professor of business who stood before his class at a prestigious university and performed a rather strange experiment. He took out an empty pail and put it on his desk. He began to put large rocks in the pail until they reached the top. He asked his students if the bucket was full. A few of them impetuously raised their hands and declared that the bucket looked full. Then he took some finer gravel out of his desk drawer and poured it into the pail until it reached the brim. He asked them again if the bucket was full. It didn't take them long to catch on, as they were rather bright. They understood there was something that could displace those smaller rocks, so they said no. The teacher then pulled out another pail of sand and began pouring it in the bucket to reach the top. They said that it still wasn't full and he told them they were right, as he slowly poured a cup of water in it until it soaked into the sand and around the rocks beneath, and finally the bucket could hold no more and the water began to spill out onto the desk. He asked them again if the bucket was full and they correctly answered yes. Well, he then asked them what the lesson was from that experiment. One of the students said that it was a lesson in time management. That if you balance your time correctly, you can always fit something else in. The professor said no, that wasn't the lesson. The lesson was this: if you don't put the large rocks in first, you'll never get them in there. And that's the way it is with life. There are some very big things that must go into our lives, and they must go in there first, or you will never fit them in.

The problem with so many of us is we attend to things that, in the big scheme of things, don't matter that much. And we make sure we put those things in their rightful place in our lives, THEN we go searching for God and trying to include spiritual things. We treat the kingdom of God like a checklist or to-do list that we try to weave into our schedules finding a little time here and there to devote to God or Bible study. But that's not how it's done.

If you really want to serve the Lord, and love Him with all your mind, soul, heart and strength, and seek first the kingdom of God, you've got to put that in there FIRST. You must make a resolution. You must make a decision and decide that spiritual things, the work of the church, your worship and relationship to God will come before EVERYTHING ELSE. Then, you let everything else find its place within your life. This year can be a great year of spiritual beginnings, perhaps spiritual renewal, for you. But you've got to make up your mind for it to be so. Set the course for the rest of your life. If you'll make that decision today, the Lord will help you. I pray that you will.

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