

“Gotta Serve Somebody—Choose this Day Who You Will Serve” *Worship Leader, Denise Pass*
“The Value of Worshiping God Together as a Family” *February 10, 2019*

Key Text: Joshua 24:15-24

I. Introduction – Choose This Day Who You Will Serve

Good morning, family! Thank you for choosing to come and worship God here together with us today. So, as you got out of bed and came to church, did you think, gee, *who* will I serve today? Probably not. We might not have made a conscientious statement like that to ourselves, but statistics show that the average adult makes 35,000 decisions a day! That’s a lot of choices! For some of us who belabor decisions, it might be more like 20,000. And while some of our decisions do not bear spiritual significance, like what socks are we going to wear today, many of our daily choices are informed by our faith. What will we watch on tv? What will we listen to as Christ followers? Who will we hang out with? How can a family stay together and worship God in this world that seemingly denies its Creator?

This passage in Joshua this morning is challenging us to consider the stumbling blocks of sin and idolatry in our way. Joshua and God’s people had just lived through 40 years of struggling with sin and idols and Joshua was challenging God’s people to let it go and choose God. They had a problem, well many of them. And we do to. The reality is

II. The Problem

We live in a fallen world, y’all. The world system operates in sin. We see this in

- *1 John 2:16 (NIV): “For everything in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--comes not from the Father but from the world.”*
- And in *Proverbs 14:12 (ESV), “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death.”*
- And in *Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV) “the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”*

We cannot trust our own hearts. With all of these spiritual realities going on, we begin to realize that there are many obstacles, sins and idols, in the way of us making a choice to serve and worship God. Our idols may not look the same as God’s people in the Old Testament had, but they have the same root. Now hang with me here this morning as some idols and sins that are common to us all are revealed. These obstacles lead us to a hope that nothing can take away.

III. Obstacles to Choosing to Serve God

Obstacle #1: It’s Hard to Choose: The Lust of the Flesh

Choices are hard *if* we truly make them. Compromise will slither in if we let it. We have been in the world system so long, we are not able to discern the spiritual realities around us and choose God unless we study His word. In *Joshua 24:14 (NLT)* it says: **“So fear the Lord and serve him wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord alone.”** Joshua is advising the people of God to have a singular focus. One priority as Pastor Lauren shared a few weeks back. But just saying we choose Christ as our priority does not mean we do. We can’t choose God unless we cast down the idols our culture worships around us. Unless we see our inclination toward sin, we cannot be set free. We aren’t enough. But Christ is our sufficiency. In this age of political correctness, we can lose our way, and if we don’t choose, we are still choosing, nonetheless. The word, “Choose” in Joshua 24:15, is בָּחַרְנוּ *ba-hă-rū* in Hebrew, which means to choose, to select, to pick; to prefer; to appoint. It is intentional. Choosing is a funny thing. We may want to be right in everyone’s eyes and can be afraid to choose. This is hard because our sin and the idols of pleasing self and fearing man get in the way. We can choose Christ and still love those who don’t. We can speak truth with grace into a lost culture to help them see how the enemy has blinded them. We were once blind, too. We are not better if we can see. But we are accountable for what we do see. And if we choose Christ, we have to live it out. Otherwise, our faith becomes a stumbling block to others.

Obstacle #2: Entitlement: The Lust of the Eyes and The Idol of Comfort

We tend to think we deserve blessing, right? This is an issue for me with dieting. I feel so deprived and wonder why I can't have what others can. So what do we really deserve? **Romans 6:23(NIV) says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** We deserve death, but Christ bore it for us. This is what we celebrate here every Sunday. Part of our struggle with entitlement is that we live in a blessed culture where we have so many choices, don't we? And, I daresay, when some of those choices are removed or we are told some choices are a "no, no", our flesh rises with a sense of entitlement. Starbuck's, for example, has spoiled us with so many choices. Ordering a cup of coffee is now so complicated. Ever ordered a Caramel Macchiato, Venti, Skim, Extra Shot, Extra-Hot, Extra-Whip, Sugar-Free. I like a skinny cinnamon dolce latte with whip, personally. But we cannot allow the blessings of this life to prevent us from seeing our need of Christ.

Obstacle #3: Confusion: The Battle of the Flesh

Galatians 5:17 (ESV) says, "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." All these choices can get confusing. And sometimes choices can get us into big trouble, can't they? Like Adam and Eve, we can choose our own way, or God's. It's called free will. What will we do with the free will that God has given us?

Obstacle #4: Ignorance: The Sin of Omission

James 4:17 (NET) "So whoever knows what is good to do and does not do it is guilty of sin." If we are not in God's word, we will be ignorant of our need of God and won't see our sin in the choices we make. This problem can be remedied as we go to God's word for the answers. I don't read God's word because I am good. I read it because He commands me to and I see I am not good apart from His grace. Whether we know it or not, we are serving somebody with every single choice we make. Bob Dylan, a singer/songwriter wrote a song called, "Gotta Serve Somebody". The chorus to this song says: "You're gonna have to serve somebody, Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord. But you're gonna have to serve somebody." You see, there really are only two choices - who are we serving today?

Obstacle #5: Persecution and Challenges: The Fear of Man

Proverbs 29:25 (NIV) "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe." If we want to be safe, we need to choose God, not man. Choosing Christ will not be a popular decision. We will be persecuted for it. Our Savior, was, too. It's not popular because it goes against culture. And it will be hard. For most of my life, I lived in fear and wanted safety. I made safety my Savior without realizing it. As a mom of 5 children who have also chosen to follow Christ, I want to share with you the good, the bad and the ugly of what it looks like to choose to serve Christ as a family. Every choice I made these past 30 years was guided by a desire to honor God and choose Him as LORD over our house. Constantly I tried to remove sin from our home and the struggle has been real. Let's be real here, folks. When we choose Christ, we are under attack. It's messy, people. I have had a ministry for the past 17 years and those early years of traveling and singing or speaking with babies and toddlers, oh my. Our van looked something like out of the Beverly Hillbillies. The keyboard was over the top of my children's heads, pandemonium was in the backseat. My kids were keeping me running! I was in the middle of adopting my youngest son, too. These are pictures of my children and I when I was serving at Westover Hills UMC in Richmond in 2004 while on staff there. That same year I founded a Christian home educational co-op that served hundreds of families and ran that organization for 12 years. Why? Because that was God's calling for me and my house. I chose (and was called by God) to home educate my children, but this is not for everyone. I look back now and can see why we were called to it. I chose to do Bible time with them (as able) before anything else at the beginning of the day. This choice would be tested by sickness, poor behavior and life's drama. I put filters on computers, got passwords and held them accountable, took their phones or stuck them on the counter at night, lost sleep many nights praying and counseling my children and was broken when I discovered sin in the camp and needed to confront it. I gave them devotionals for birthday and Christmas gifts. All of my kids were like, mom, really? We could never read all of these books. But they were watching as I devoured devotional after devotional and rose early to seek God. It was hard because the enemy seeks to confuse our minds and get us to a place of discouragement. But as Jerry Falwell said, **"The measure of a man is not what he**

accomplishes, but what it takes to discourage him”. My children are home from college today and will be sharing their gifts in worship during the 929 service. But even as I was laying the foundation for my children, our home fell apart and the father of my children was removed from our home. And if it had not been for choosing Christ, I don’t know where I would be. Christ carried us and then brought my husband Clay into our lives. Choosing Christ does not mean we will have a perfect life, but it does mean He is our life. God is with us through it all. My children are a delight to me and are almost all grown up now. They were dedicated to the LORD as babies and later upon the profession of their faith, they chose to be baptized. They have all professed Christ, but they are not perfect, either, and now they have to daily choose Christ, as well.

Obstacle #6 Head Games: The Battle of the Mind

2 Corinthians 12:3-5 (ESV), “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” Another obstacle to choosing Christ is the mental battles we face that keep us bound in discouragement or depression. We have to be in God’s word in order to think clearly. We need to guard our hearts and minds and take captive thoughts that don’t line up with God’s word. If we choose to serve God, we will need to pay attention to the details. Because the devil is in the details, too. We must choose every day who we will serve because our mindsets shift.

Obstacle #7 We Think We Are Good: Boastful Pride of Life

Unless we see our wretchedness before a Holy God, we will not see our need of His salvation. God did not come to die for a basically good people. He knew we were desperate sinners. Anything good in us is Christ alone. We see this in **Romans 3:10-11 (NIV) says, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.”** And **1 John 1:8 (ESV) says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”** and **Isaiah 53:6 (NLT) says, “All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.”** That’s such good news, isn’t it? We have to understand our sinful condition to see our need of salvation. This is a hard thought. We want to think we are good. But why would a Holy God need to come and die the most shameful, horrible death if we were good? Such a radical measure is taken because our need is desperate. We must lay down our boastful pride of life. Friends, as it says in **1 Corinthians 1:30 (NIV), “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”** Christ is our righteousness. Not us. And we must again and again be willing to confront our sins and lay down the idols that pop back up. All of these obstacles try to prevent us from seeing our need of salvation—from choosing Christ and who we will serve. When we don’t see our need of God, we will not deny self. As it says in **John 5:30 (NLT), “I can do nothing on my own. I judge as God tells me. Therefore, my judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will.”**

IV. How We Choose Christ as a Family

1. **God’s word.** First, God’s people should not be biblically illiterate. We have got to be in God’s word daily. The word of God cuts through the noise of the world and helps us to choose Christ. Joshua has the authority of Scripture at the core of his foundation. **Joshua 1:8 (ESV) says, “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”** This is the word of God for the people of God. Amen?
2. **Walk in the Spirit.** Second, obedience can help to motivate us. Going against the flesh is really hard. But when we recognize the flesh and choose to walk in the Spirit and obey God, it gets easier to hear the voice of God. Choosing to serve God is choosing to obey His Word. And it starts in our homes. **Galatians 5:16,24 (NLT), says, “16 But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. 24 Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”.**

3. **Boundaries.** Boundaries set in our lives help to keep us aligned with God. We need to examine ourselves to make sure worldly influences haven't slipped into our home and clean our house of idols once again. *Psalm 101:2 (NLT)* says, ***"I will be careful to live a blameless life—when will you come to help me? I will lead a life of integrity in my own home."*** This is where we manage all of our electronic devices and music. Our home must be a refuge from the world.
4. **Accountable.** Fearing man will keep us from serving God. We are accountable for all of the truth we know. You are now accountable to what was shared today. *Genesis 18:19(a) (NIV)* it says, ***"For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just."*** We must be faithful! It will be hard. But nothing of worth comes easily, does it?
5. **The fear of the LORD** has been a motivator to choosing God all my life. When I didn't know God, I still believed He had the authority to save or condemn. This fear is a reverence and desire to want to honor Him. When we are tempted to fear man over God, *Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)*, ***"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."*** reminds us of our purpose. Trying to please man over God's revealed will only leads to compromise.
6. **Be Consistent.** When we consistently lay a foundation of truth without compromise, our children are not confused when the world tempts them. Read His word daily. Even when family members make choices that seemingly destroy our family, if Christ is the foundation of that home, it will stand. *1 Chronicles 16:11 (ESV)*, ***"Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!"***
7. **By the Grace of God.** This choosing of God is only done by His grace alone, friends. I could not choose to serve God if He had not opened my eyes and saved me. Cry out to God. Don't stop seeking Him. *Romans 3:23-24* says, ***"23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."***

What first seemed like an easy choice to serve God, we now realize we will face obstacles and have to have a game plan to do so. Our choosing begins with salvation. The day God chose me and revealed my need for salvation, I chose to accept Christ and everything changed and affected my daily life. It was a changed heart strangely warmed - that all followed a choice. God does the work in us if we will just come and repent, lay down our idols and ask Him to save us.

V. How the Church Chooses to Serve God

God is also calling us to choose to serve God together as a church. The church equips families and the body of Christ for service to the LORD. And the church is accountable to God, too. Paul wrote many letters to the churches about heresies and sins that snuck in. We also see in the book of Revelation, Christ speaking to the churches - calling out where they were not faithfully serving the LORD. The same struggles the churches faced in Scripture, we will face, also: Is the word of God our standard, or is it the surrounding culture? Are we maintaining the original vision? Or being distracted with social causes in our culture? Church, we are called to be world changers, upholding God's standards, not man's. The church is accountable to God. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." God's word is clear for every single social issue the culture around us is facing. When the church is diligently studying God's word and applying it, we are being stewards of the truth and must share it with a hurting world with truth and grace. Will we use our voice to share our choice?

VI. Why Choose God?

The decision to choose to serve God is not just for ourselves. It impacts everyone around us and our entire life. The difference choosing to serve God in my life has made is supernatural. Incredible. People ask me how I made it through some of the traumatic events in my life. I know it is only because I accepted the gift of salvation and chose to serve God. The value of choosing God cannot even be enumerated. But its fruit is seen in the lives of those who choose. We can have joy in the midst of suffering. Peace in times of trouble. When we live boldly for Christ in truth and humility, with love as our motive, the blind can see. Those bound in sin are set free. We are free to rise above sin and enjoy the

abundant life God promises. Finally, our Dad in Heaven gives us wisdom (James 1:5) whenever we need it. Proverbs 3:5-6 says to lean not on our own understanding. When we don't know what is right, we can go to God's word.

Joshua asked the people to act on what they professed with their mouths. He invited them to cast their idols down to demonstrate who they were serving. I am going to invite Mason, a Team Leader at the Methodist Adventure camp in Northern Virginia, "Camp Highroad" to come sign a song. It is also an invitation for you to come and lay down what is keeping you from choosing to serve God. Serving God is not just good works done. It is obedience to God and living for Him. It is knowing Him and following His voice over the world's. Just like Joshua invited God's people to choose, I am doing this altar call because you get to choose, too. Some of you have chosen already. But we still need to clean house and lay down the influence of the world that has snuck in. Some of you have never seen your need of God like you do today. God is inviting you to come and admit that need so you can receive His grace.

VII. Let us pray.

Lord, some here today are so discouraged because they feel they are stuck and don't have a choice. Other people made choices for their life and they feel incapable of rising up and choosing for themselves this righteous life. Strengthen them, LORD. Lord, help us to choose You now. Some here need a refreshing from You to keep going. Help us to choose You every day, LORD, and to help others to do the same. In Jesus' name, Amen.