

THE DAILY CHOICE OF GRATITUDE

Daily Choosing to Honor God

Joshua 24:1-5, 13-15

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-daily-choice-of-gratitude-daily-choosing-to-honor-god/>

Not everyone here this morning was alive 50 years ago today. Or even if you were, you don't remember what you were doing. I do. On November 12, 1967, something happened that changed my life. I was 15 years old, and I had been feeling God tugging at my heart about something weird, a call to vocational ministry. I protested. What could God do with a pimple-faced farm boy? Besides, I wanted to finish high school and college, have my fun, and then think about ruining my life by being a pastor. Weren't preachers the ones who always wore black suits and walked around looking as if they'd been sucking pickles since 5:00am?

My little home church, Maple Grove Baptist, was holding a revival meeting that week, and I was afraid to attend, because I knew God was calling me. Lucky for me, I was in the high school play and we had rehearsals each night. Whew. That was close. But I forgot one thing. There was no play practice on Sunday morning, November 12. So, I attended church that morning. I don't remember what the evangelist said. All I remember is that when he gave the invitation, I began to shake. I knew God wanted me to serve him. And I made a decision, a commitment, to follow Christ into the ministry. And I've never regretted it or looked back. Fifty years ago this very morning.

Just as God spoke to Joshua and the Israelites in v. 13, so I heard this word of grace. God was so good. It wasn't anything special about me, or anything I had done to deserve God's favor. How could I thank Him? Out of gratitude, I wanted to honor God with my life—my talents, my treasure, my time.

How do we honor and thank God? Well, vv. 14-15 give us clues. We are to "revere" God (some translations use the word fear). It means to honor God with complete devotion. And we honor God by serving (that word is used 6 times in vv. 14-15 and approximately 13 times through v. 24, depending on your translation). Serve! And serve "in sincerity" (v. 14). That means with a completeness, in a seamless way. You see, almost all of us have holes in our Christian stewardship. That is, there are areas of our lives in which we are not serving, not being good stewards, not honoring God as much as in others. Time, treasure, influence, talents. Proverbs 3:9 says, "Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce." It might be our life needs updating our in financial commitment, our commitment of time or influence or our talents. Which one is lagging behind in your life?

This isn't the first time the Israelites have entered covenant with Yahweh. This is covenant renewal. My commitment to Christ on that November day was not my first. I had made my profession of faith at age 8. This was the next step. And sometimes we need to pause and be grateful and renew our covenant with the Lord.

I love v. 15. “Choose you this day whom you will serve....As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” We had this on a plaque in our home in Sedalia. Imagine. God creates with the freedom to choose whether or not we honor Him. Each day, we are always voting yes or no, for or against gods of culture. Choose today whom you will serve—this helps us know God better; this clears up our own identity as His children; this helps us impact our culture; and this helps us build a bridge to our future. Joshua was a bridge figure, bridging Moses, the giver of the Law and the later prophets and even Jesus, the fulfillment of the Law. In what ways are our commitments, the ways we honor God and practice gratitude, bridges to the future? For our church and for the Kingdom? A bridge for our children, grandchildren and youth. For the unchurched. How is our generosity a bridge to God’s new thing?

I recently met a lovely young lady from Nigeria, working in healthcare. She told me her father back in Nigeria was recently chosen as the new king of his tribe. “But,” she said, “he will not accept it, because kings are to acknowledge the local gods and he will not forsake the one, true living God!” I wonder if each of us has the courage to daily make that choice.

This morning, before our usual response time, I want us to pause for one full minute and silently reflect on two statements which I will ask you to complete in your own heart. “I am grateful to God for...” And then this one: “I will honor God by...”