

Families Nearer Heaven Joshua—Taking a Stand for Truth

Intro: It was a critical time in the history of the Israelites. For the second time since the Exodus a great leader of Israel was about to pass from their midst. A few years before, Moses, in his final days, had gathered the people of God together to exhort them before departing this life. In his place, Joshua was chosen by God to lead the nation; but now he too is about to depart this life. And like Moses, Joshua now calls the people together for a departing word of exhortation and in this exhortation we can learn an important message about family.

Joshua's Farewell Words to Israel

A Call to Remember (Josh. 24:1-13)

Joshua wanted the Israelites to recall their history from the beginning. He reminded them that their ancestors had not always known the true god and they had in fact served the false gods worshipped by the people who lived beyond the Euphrates.

But God had chosen to reveal Himself to Abraham and brought him from Ur to Canaan and there promised him Canaan as his possession. From him, the Israelite nation was formed and was delivered by God from bondage to possess the land God had promised, not through their might but through God's great grace and power.

But now in view of all that God had done, Joshua issues:

A Call to Choose (Josh. 24:14-18)

Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:14-15)

What Joshua wanted to make clear was that there was no room for compromise or divided loyalties! The Israelites could serve the Lord or they could choose to serve the false gods of Mesopotamia or Canaan; but they couldn't do both!

What is equally clear is that Joshua is testing the people by his exhortation. They took umbrage it appears at Joshua's suggestion that they would consider serving another God:

And the people answered and said, Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. And the Lord drove out from before

us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God.” (Joshua 24:16-18)

The Israelites did not think of themselves as having forsaken the Lord and they seemed distressed by the suggestion that they should be challenged to choose between the Lord and the idols. Joshua pressed them further to acknowledge the inner weaknesses that were already in evidence among the people and their consequences:

Then Joshua said to the people, “You will not be able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you.” (Joshua 24:19-20)

Again the people respond with resistance:

And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:21)

Clearly the people did not want to be considered unfaithful to the Lord; yet Joshua’s final words tell us the real condition of Israel’s loyalty:

Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” (Joshua 24:23)

Joshua’s message had come from a God who could see in their tents the various idols that they were already keeping in their possession; but in addition He could see into their hearts and know that they were “inclined” in another direction. Thus they needed the call not only to choose, but

A Call to Commit (Josh. 24:25-28)

Joshua urges them to declare their choice by making anew their covenant with God to serve Him only.

This call by Joshua was a defining moment in the history of Israel. It was Joshua’s way of soliciting from his own generation a lasting commitment to serve the Lord faithfully.

This call by Joshua was also a defining moment in the life of his family. It was his way of taking a stand as a father and declaring his commitment to urge his family to faithfully continue the service of God!

Taking a stand for God

In every generation, Joshua’s call is needed; and if Joshua were here today he might challenge us to make a similar choice! Today we need family leaders who will urge their families to take a stand. What can we learn from Joshua’s statement?

First we cannot assume that our children will serve God merely because we do!

Joshua took nothing for granted; but often Christian parents make this mistake. They assume that their children will believe as they believe and do as they do.

However through the years I have observed that children will probably test every conclusion and will often serve God with less dedication and conviction. The reason is simple: What is easily gained is easily surrendered.

This suggests that we take nothing for granted; but work hard to ensure that our children have their own convictions based on solid evidence given to them for faith. God has no “grandchildren”.

Second we learn that fathers need to lead the way in serving the Lord.

Like Joshua fathers need to indicate their own desire to serve God.

This is not merely done through making a declaration; but through the actions of their lives.

Children need to see their fathers acknowledge God day by day:

By leading the family in prayer

By spending time sharing Bible stories

By making known God's will as the solution to family concerns and problems.

By letting them see you growing in your faith

The head of the family can insist that his family serve God.

One of the challenges of parenting is the unwillingness of children to see the importance of Bible study, worship, etc. Through the years I've known a few parents who thought it better not to “force” their children to do these things. They reasoned that making them do such things would cause them to hate the church and turn away from it. Yet we do not do this in any other area where the real interests of our children are at stake.

What if a child didn't want to brush his teeth?

What if he didn't want to go to a doctor?

What if he didn't want to go to school?

Surely, we realize that though children may not like to do such things they must learn that they are important and we must insist that they do them.

I'm not suggesting that a forced faith is a valid one; I'm suggesting that children may not as children appreciate the value of all that we are seeking to teach them; but hopefully as they mature they'll appreciate the fact that you insisted that they honor God when they might not have seen the importance of it. In the meantime we must try to make the experience as pleasant as we can; but not surrender important activities because of childish resistance.

There is a need to take a stand on important cultural issues.

As parents we must take a stand on matters of obedience to God. May I suggest some stands that my parents took and which would help your children grow up to be the most spiritual and productive:

We would go to all services of the church and would not allow secular activities to interfere with them.

We would be encouraged to do our best with school work.

We would always dress appropriately for the occasion and without improper exposure of the body.

We would be expected to respect those that were older and in authority and to be considerate of the property of others.

We would not be allowed to go anywhere without indicating where we would be and with whom and where there would be responsible adult supervision.

We would not be allowed to participate in any activity of questionable morality.

I've seen parents who would not take a stand because of the fear that their children would not "like" them. That turns out to be the greatest way to ensure that they won't respect you. Parenting is not for wimps! Be a parent! Take a stand! Say, "this is the way it's going to be!"

Conclusion: I hope that you too will be the "Joshua" of your family and say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord".