

## Choose Wisely!

A sermon based on Joshua 24:1-2,14-18

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Indiana Jones just barely survived the first trap. Perhaps you recall the scene from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. At the last second, he understood that a penitent man bows before God. And falling to his knees, the blade went right over his head instead of taking it from his body. He then followed the footsteps of the Lord, stepping on the letters that spell “Jehovah,” almost remembering too late that there is no “J” in Latin. He took a leap of faith to cross the invisible bridge and finally arrived in the room where an old knight protected the cup that Jesus used at the very first Lord’s Supper—the Holy Grail.

But there were hundreds of cups sitting in that room. Which was the right one? Indy had to choose wisely. He let the antagonist of the story chose first. And that man chose poorly. Drinking from cup he aged rapidly and turned to dust right before Indy’s very eyes. And the old knight explained that just as the true grail would bring life, so any false grail would take it from you.

And then it’s Indy’s turn. He had to choose wisely. If he chose wrong, he too would die a horrible death (and not so mention, so would his father, who had been shot and lay outside bleeding to death himself). A lot was riding on his decision...

As he was nearing the end of his ministry, Joshua presented the Israelites with a choice. And their decision was a life or death decision too. Which cup would they choose? How would they live their lives? Who would they serve? Would they choose wisely or not? Even without reading any further in the book of Joshua, or any of the other Old Testament books detailing the history of the Israelites from then on, I’m sure you can figure out whether they chose wisely or not.

But, even before we go there, look at what led up to this point...to this conversation. Joshua said to the people, ***“Long ago your forefathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River (the Euphrates River) and worshiped other gods...Now [you] fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.”***

Wait, did you get that? The gods beyond the River. The idols of their forefathers...Joshua wanted them to throw them away. What?!?! You mean, the Israelites had been carrying these idols with them this entire time?! After God rescued them and brought them out of Egypt, they carried these idols along. For 40 years of wandering in the desert, as they experienced God’s kindness and care each day, as he provided them food (manna from heaven) to eat and water to drink, and they carried these idols along. Throughout the entire campaign of reclaiming the Promised Land (including crossing the Jordan River, the fall of Jericho, their annihilating every king and kingdom who stood in their way because God was fighting for them), and they carried these idols along.

And, like the aged knight in Indiana Jones, we would say, “You chose poorly.” Even disregarding the repeated rebellion against God the Israelites would carry out in the future, for their past, they deserved to be rejected by God for the way they chose...to have other idols.

So then, what does that mean for us?

Well, I'm fairly confident none of you have a shrine at home dedicated to these carved idols or statues or images to false gods. We just don't do that. We only have one God in heaven.

Or do we? Let me ask you two simple questions: How do you choose to spend your money? What do you choose to do with your time? Because, believe or not, those two questions are probably the best indicator of what your god is.

The Israelites had been carrying these idols around with them wherever they went, but there's a different idol most of you are carrying around with you right now...your wallet.

There's this phrase that says, "Cash rules everything around me." And, not that I'm accusing you of bowing down to the almighty "Dollar," and not that I'm saying that money is the devil (the Bible doesn't make that statement either), but think about how easily money can start to dictate your life and the way you make decisions.

Right? Again, how do you choose to spend your money? You're sitting on this pile of credit card debt, but PFD sales are coming up, and you have to get this new car (after all, financing is at 0% interest for the next 60 months), when your 10-year-old, paid-off car at home still runs great...or maybe it's a new TV or a bunch of new clothes or a new furniture set. Or, your entertainment/going out to eat budget each month is THIS BIG, while the amount you set aside for home/car maintenance is this big (maybe even non-existent, more kind of a reactionary line item, which probably leads to digging a deeper debt hole). The money you spend on your hobby begins to eclipse the offerings you gift to Jesus...maybe it's even completely butted those out. It's not hard to see the truth in the phrase "cash is king." For so many, it is.

And for others, time is king. Again, what do you choose to do with your time? Well, again, because cash is king, you've developed this certain type of lifestyle you want to maintain, which now means you have to work overtime to be able to support that. But overtime means you're cutting into quality time with your spouse or kids. It's making you ornery, which affects the relationships you have. It tires you out, meaning weekends you want to sleep in, making Sunday worship that much harder to get to.

Or, if I'm trying to read my devotion for the day, but I left the muted TV on and kept looking up at it (maybe I was even trying to quickly get through the devotion during the commercial break), has that become my god, as I can't spend five uninterrupted minutes focusing on Jesus and his Word?

Or, I'm sitting at church, but I'm thinking about the brunch I can't wait to get to after worship, or I'm wondering how the Packers are doing, or I'm working on the grocery list in my head, where's your commitment?

Friends, what consumes your thoughts? What becomes the focus of your day? What's been the focus of your life? Who/what is your god? Maybe, it's just your choices. Every day is full of them. Do you always make good choices? Are there bad choices? Do you always choose wisely? Do you choose you over God?

I'll admit, these don't always necessarily seem like life or death decisions, but they are. We would eagerly pipe in with the Israelites, "**Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! We too will serve the LORD,**" and we very well may have the best intentions of doing exactly that, but like them, we fail to keep that promise. The truth is, choosing to serve other "gods," that deserve death. It's a 1<sup>st</sup>

Commandment issue. ***“You shall have no other gods,” God demands, “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything...for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.”*** Have you? I know I have. And so, we deserve to be forsaken. We deserve eternal death and to be forsaken forever in hell.

But, where the Israelites chose to serve themselves and idols, God chose his people. ***“He is our God”*** was not their choice. It was his. He made them his own.

The verses we skipped over make that clear. Listen to how many times God says, ***“I” ...<sup>2</sup> Joshua said to all the people, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. <sup>3</sup> But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants... I gave him Isaac, <sup>4</sup> and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.***

***<sup>5</sup> “ I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. <sup>6</sup> When I brought your fathers out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. <sup>7</sup> But they cried to the Lord for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the desert for a long time.***

***<sup>8</sup> “ I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. <sup>9</sup> When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. <sup>10</sup> But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.***

***<sup>11</sup> “ Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. <sup>12</sup> I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. <sup>13</sup> So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.’***

And it might seem like God chose foolishly. He chose rebels who would stray again and again. But God chose not for something in them, but entirely by his grace. And for us, who have often chosen poorly and sinfully, who have strayed from and rebelled against him, God chose us, too.

Before time began, Ephesians tells us he chose you to be his own...not because of anything you had done or would do, but entirely by his grace. And he rescued you. He rescued you not from Egyptians, but from satan. He rescued you not from slavery, but from sin. He rescued you not from enemy territory, but from hell.

How? Well, Joshua here is a type of Christ. In fact, Jesus is Greek for Joshua. And both names mean “The Lord saves.” Just as God fought the battles for the Israelites and really handed them the land when they put their trust in him, so God fought the battle for us in Christ, who fought temptations to sin and lived perfectly, who fought sin and Satan on the cross and defeated them with his death, who fought death

and won when he rose on Easter Sunday. That was all Jesus. We do nothing. We trust in him and in what he's done...in his choice and in his grace to save us.

And now, God, like Joshua here, calls for us to make a decision (and it's not a decision that in any way can gain you favor with God). But as a response to God's grace, decide who you will serve. I mean, we have to serve someone. Other gods? Own sinful nature? Or the God who's rescued us from slavery to sin through Jesus. It's really a no-brainer. You don't have to be smart like Indiana Jones to figure it out.

Which would you choose: Dial-up internet at \$99/month or 1GB downloads at \$15/month? It's a no brainer! Or, which would you choose: A free fillet mignon and lobster tail dinner? Or a can of SPAM that costs \$2? Which would you choose? Serving the God who rescued you from sin, death and hell, or serving your own sinful appetites which lead you away from Jesus and toward eternal death in hell? It's a no brainer, isn't it?

The choices are in front of you. Choose wisely! Choose to spend less money so you'll be able to give more. Choose to spend less time being entertained so you'll be able to spend more time serving others. Ultimately, choose to serve yourself less so you might serve God more.

And do so know this isn't a life and death decision. Your life has been saved. It's a done deal. The pressure's off. But now it's a decision to show gratitude to the one who chose you to be his own and did all it took to make it so. It's a no brainer. Let's choose to live for him, our God! Amen.