Making the Best Decisions

11/08/2020

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*Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. **2** And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors-Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor-lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. 3 Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac.14 "Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." **16** Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; **17** for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; **18** and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God." 19 But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. 20 If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good." 21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, we will serve the LORD!" 22 Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." 23 He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." 24 The people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey." 25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem*. (Joshua 24:1-3 & 14-25).

1. Making the Right Decisions

Every day is filled with hundreds of decisions that we need to make. We have to choose what we'll wear, eat, and do. Many of them don't have

a big impact on our lives. However, we often face big moments where we need to make major decisions for our lives.

One of the best decisions I made was to marry my wife, Christine. There are many reasons that I am thankful for. One of them is her cooking. Quite often she asks me what I want to eat for lunch and dinner. When I say what I want, she cooks and lets me enjoy my favorite food without going to a restaurant.

Some decisions like marriage have a lasting impact. This morning we see a case that Joshua asks the Israelites and us to make a very important decision for our lives.

2. Joshua's Farewell Speech

After Moses' death God called Joshua, Moses' assistant to be the new leader of the Israelites. Joshua led the people across the Jordan River until they took the Promised Land.

In chapter 24 of Joshua, we notice that Joshua knew his mission was almost over. Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israelites and their leaders together at Shechem for a renewal of the covenant. It was time for Joshua to deliver his farewell speech. Like Moses, Joshua told the people to prepare for his death.

Joshua delivered what the Lord says, "***Long ago your ancestors-Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor-lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods***" (verse 2). God reminded the people of Abraham's polytheistic life while he lived in Mesopotamia. It would have been quite common for people of that time to worship many gods. But God called Abraham and made a covenant with him and led him to live according to God's purposes.

God gave Abraham and Sarah their son Isaac and their grandsons, Esau and Jacob. When Abraham's descendants suffered in Egypt, God sent Moses to deliver them from Egypt. God continued to remind them of what God did for them in the wilderness and in the land of the Amorites, Jericho, and the Promised Land.

Joshua then asks the Israelites whether they are willing to continue to fear the Lord, accept his authority, and live in a covenant relationship with God. What I really like about this passage is the way Joshua says. He is giving them a different choice. In verse 15, Joshua says, "***Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord****."* Joshua publicly

made his commitment to God, declaring that he and his family would serve the Lord.

The people of Israel responded, "***Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods…. we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God"*** (verse 16 & 18). In response to their affirmation, Joshua said, "***put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel***" (verse 23).

3. Putting Away the Foreign Gods

At major milestones, couples will often renew their marriage vows. Last year, we had one marriage renewal ceremony here at the church.

In the same way, especially during this current time, we can renew our covenant relationship with the Lord. We may not have a big ceremony, but we are able to always renew our decision to follow God's guidance. How can we do this?

Joshua told the Israelites to put away their foreign gods to renew their covenant with the Lord. If we want to renew our commitment to the Lord, we need to put away our foreign gods that are among us.

What are our foreign gods? These are the things that are more important to us than God. If we place value on something or a person above our value of God, these things or people can become our idols. I saw a list from someone listing the things we feel we can't live without. Home, family, career, success, beauty, comfort, money, and power were just some of the things that we can't live without. In the wake of the elections, even our favorite political leaders can easily become an idol in our lives.

4. A Renewal of the Covenant

What does the renewal of the covenant mean to us? Let us pay attention to God's covenant with Abraham. God says to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3, "***Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"*** (Genesis 12:1-3).

Who was Abraham? He was a very ordinary person. He was 75 years old and had no children. He was not one of political or religious leaders. He was neither wealthy nor a well-known person. He was just one of ordinary persons. Yet one day God called him and used him to show the people in the world how much God cared for each individual and had a plan for each

one. When Abraham heard God's call, he did neither ask any questions nor was hesitant. He just moved out his hometown in faith. The Bible does not tell us what motivated him to leave his country and his household. I believe that he wanted to be a blessing to others.

God's covenant with Abraham had a big impact not only on Abraham but also on "all the families of the earth." Paul says in Galatians 3:8, "***the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you."*** Paul argues with the Jewish Christians that all believers from every nation in every age can share in Abraham's blessing.

The renewal of a covenant relationship with God means that we remember God's call and commit to become a blessing of God in the world.

5. Questions

If Joshua would challenge us to renew our covenant with the Lord and to be a blessing to others, what would you like to respond? Are we willing to trust in the Lord and obey him, following his direction?

6. Application

This year has included the loss of hundreds of thousands of people due to COVID-19. I found myself asking the question, what is the meaning of living a longer life? The answer I found was to make a difference in the world. If someone is blessed by me in this world, I should live a longer life. However, if my life does not make any difference, I am not for sure why I should stay longer on earth.

I am sure that you may have heard the starfish story. Once upon a time, an old man saw a boy on the beach throwing a starfish into the sea. He asked the boy what he was doing. The boy replied, "throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can't return to the sea by themselves. When the sun gets high, they will die unless someone throws them back into the ocean." The old man said, "But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I'm afraid you won't really be able to make much of a difference." The boy picked up another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he said, "It made a difference to that one." Choices have consequences.

We can't save the world, but one person can be blessed by our hospitality, kindness and acts of love. Some of them would experience the love of Jesus through us and come to Jesus. Joshua encourages us to make the best decision in our lives. The best decision is to renew our commitment to the Lord and make a difference in the world. Amen.