

# Serving

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[ 0 : 00 ] The reading today is from Joshua 24 verses 1 to 15, followed by Luke 22 verses 24 to 27. Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem.

He summoned the elders, leaders, judges, and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. Joshua said to all the people, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says.

Long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshipped other gods.

But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau.

I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his family went down to Egypt. Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out.

[ 1 : 04 ] When I brought your people out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued you with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. But they cried out 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 wilderness for a long time. 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 before you, and you took possession of their land. When Balak, son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam, son of Baor, to put a curse on you.

But I would not listen to Balaam. So he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand. Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Kirgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

But I gave them into your hands. 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.

[ 2 : 22 ] 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. Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness.

Throw away the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.

Whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

And from Luke, A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Jesus said to them, The kings of the Gentiles lorded over them, and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that.

[ 3 : 26 ] Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table, or the one who serves?

It is not the one who is at the table, but I am among you as one who serves. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So would you join me for a word of prayer?

Almighty God, we give you thanks for the gift that is this time. The gift that is this morning. The gift that is our ability to worship together. And Lord, now with our hearts open as we have poured ourselves out in praise, in song, in study, and in prayer.

Move in each of us, Lord. Let your spirit fall fresh on each of us. That we may go from here into the world and bear fruit that honors and glorifies your name. In Jesus' most holy name we pray and ask.

Amen. Okay, so I'm going to give you a chance right now that if you would prefer to write something longhand, I'm going to give you a chance to find a pencil or pen while I give a couple words of introduction.

[ 4 : 38 ] Okay? Because if you got your bulletin, you know there's a little post-it note in it. Okay? So I'm going to ask you to do something with that in a minute.

But if you don't have pen out or pencil handy, I'm going to give you a chance to get one. And while you're doing that, I'm going to offer this. A lot of folks I know are goal-oriented, task-oriented, which is why some of you aren't listening to me right now.

Because you were focused on the task that I just gave you. But those of us who are task-oriented, you know, we like getting to the end of a task.

We like accomplishing a particular goal, right? So if you're that kind of person, like you make out your list, you come up with your plan, you know exactly how you're going to attack it. I need that in my life.

If I don't have a pretty clear sense of what I'm working toward or what I'm working on, life gets very, very messy around me. So I tend to be very goal- and task-oriented.

[ 5 : 36 ] But the good thing about it is when you hit that point, right, the folks who feel like me, when you can actually check something off the list, doesn't it give you that nice feeling?

You kind of get that little afterglow. You feel like, okay. Now, whether it's a quick one because you know you're just moving on to the next thing or if it's something big, you really want to celebrate, right?

Now, maybe you get to the end of the day and it's like when you have that moment when you hit the chair and you kind of go, oh, yeah, that was a good day, right? Or if it's even something bigger, you know that there's a time you want to pause, you want to celebrate.

But that, friends, is where we come across our challenge for today. And we're going to talk about the risk that happens if you spend too much time in that place.

Because there's danger in getting a little too comfortable. And what we're talking about today is not only the risk that comes with that, but how we can push back against it.

[ 6 : 40 ] Okay? So, got your pen? All right. For those of you who want to do this on your phone, you can do it that way, too. But I want you to answer a question for me.

And we're going to play a little fill-in-the-blank game. Okay? So, Luke, I want you to take two minutes and I want you to come up with as long a list as you can that fills in that blank.

I remember when God did blank for me. Okay? I'm going to give you two minutes. Two minutes. All right? Go. Maybe it was a healing.

Maybe God met a need of some kind. Maybe you got direction when you needed it. But I remember when God did blank for me. Okay. Let's see if I can pull you away from the task.

As I said, I know I'm dealing with some task-oriented people. Right? See if I can pull you up from that task. All right. Good job. Folks was focused. I'm not going to call anybody out. I saw a couple folks.

[ 7 : 41 ] But everybody was focused. You could almost smell smoke. It was folks concentrating. I like that. Okay. So here's the thing. You got your list of I can remember what God did for me.

And that's important because I want you to stay in touch with that story because it helps us get to our point. Right? So as you heard me say, we were talking about this idea of being focused on a goal, accomplishing that goal, and what happens when you get there.

Right? Because we encounter the nation of Israel at a pivotal point. That's exactly that today. So what you heard read for you today is we come to the end of the book of Joshua.

And Joshua has gathered all the people, and he's got the elders, and everybody is there. And Joshua knows he's near the end of his life. And not only is Joshua near the end of his life, but he's also at this place where we've accomplished something that has been promised for a very long time.

Because the nation has, in fact, entered and conquered the promised land. I want you to take a step back. Remember why it's called the promised land.

[ 8 : 58 ] Because it goes all the way back to Abraham when God made a promise to him. So this land on which you're standing, this place I'm showing you now, after you've walked all this way from your hometown, I'm going to give this to you.

And you're going to become a great nation, and this land is going to be for your people. Promised land. So there's a lot that happens in between Abraham hearing that from God and us getting to this moment.

Right? So we have Abraham. We have Isaac. We have Jacob. Jacob. Jacob's family then goes to Israel, and then they're enslaved there for 400 years. And then we have the exodus.

We have the time in the desert. And then we actually enter the promised land, and then there's the conquest of that. So there's a lot that happens in this time period.

And we need to sit with that for a minute. The reason why we need to sit with that for a minute is because when you've got a promise like that, when you know you're focused on a task or on a goal, right?

[ 10 : 07 ] That's when you get to that place, and then all of a sudden, it's kind of like, well, now what? And remember, for a lot of folks, that's all that had been.

It's like we knew we were going to get there. We know there's going to come a time. And it's a story that points us forward, and it's our drive, and we keep moving forward. We know this is our destiny.

And then what happens when it happens? You're here now. Okay? That's a big deal.

Okay? Because we can end up in this place where we get far too comfortable. When you've got the goal and you're working toward the goal, your energy is locked in.

You know what you're supposed to do, and you're headed there. But then what? And especially when this has been so all-consuming, right?

[ 11 : 10 ] I want you to hear the story again. Because Joshua, being the leader, and God, of course, speaking to the people through Joshua, understands the risk now.

Understands what's happening. Because if this has been our aim, if this has been where we've been headed, and now we're here, you've got to remember some things. And so one of the most important things that happens is as we set this up, Joshua reminds the people of their story.

Right? So what you heard was all of this that happens, but I want to pick up on the part that just Joshua himself would have been able to see. Right?

So if you're with me, we're in Joshua 24. We're going to skip into verse 5. We started at verse 1, but I'm going to pick us up at verse 5. Because this is the parts that Joshua would have been a part of himself.

Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there. I brought you out. And when I brought your people out of Egypt, you came to the sea.

[ 12 : 21 ] And the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. 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. Then you lived in the wilderness for a long time. 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 before you, and you took possession of their land.

When Balak, son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent Balaam, son of Baor, to put a curse on you. But I would not listen to Balaam.

So he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand. Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

[ 13 : 29 ] But I gave them into your hands. 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. I want us to stop there, okay? Hear that sentence again. You did not do it with your own sword and bow.

That is a long list of stuff, right? We have seen this before. We've talked about this in a couple different messages, where it's the idea of God is pretty good at reminding you of God's record, right?

God shows up in our lives, and God does these things. And it's easy for us to forget that God has done these things. I want you to emphasize one particular word in that sentence.

It's easy for us to forget that God has done these things. Now, of course, we have to do our part, okay?

[ 14 : 29 ] The people strapped on their swords, and they went out and they faced those enemies. They beat them back. I'm sure they lost folks in those battles. All those things. But really?

You think a group of people who were making bricks, people who were harvesting crops, are now some military superpower that took down the superpower on earth at the time, which was Egypt, and all these other kingdoms that were used to fighting wars against each other.

And all of a sudden, this group, with no skills, no practice, and has been wandering in the desert all this time, all of a sudden is able to take care of that business.

You did not do this with your own sword and bow. You notice how the voice in the story changes? You hear all that I, right?

Because God is reminding people of the record. Okay? I did this. Before you get too full of yourself because you start remembering them battles, remember that whole parting the sea thing.

[ 15 : 46 ] Did you do that? That whole pillar of fire, that whole coming down from the mountain with the law of peace, did you do that?

See, and that's what we got to remember. It's important that we don't lose this peace as we get into these places where we get to the end of the line or we accomplish a goal and we start feeling too good about ourselves.

Not only do we feel too good about ourselves, but then we start to get a little complacent. We start to get a little comfortable because we've been striving for this for so long and it's right to celebrate.

It's right to acknowledge. It's right to pause and say, yes, this is special. But we cannot forget how we got here. And that's really the point.

And the reason why we're spending so much time on this is the question that Joshua asks people only gets its power because he sets it up like this.

[ 16 : 57 ] Because when you remember that it is God who has done all these things for you, that you did not get here by accident, then when Joshua asked the people, so choose this day who you will serve.

Will it be the gods of those folks or the God that brought you here? That's why that question is so powerful.

That's why that choice matters. Choose this day who you will serve. Friends, we do that all day, every day.

Our lives are exactly the same. When we get out of bed, our feet hit the floor, and then we start going through our day, we start making choices. And our choices will reflect.

Am I going to choose the God that I profess? Am I going to choose the God that brought me here? Or am I going to choose the world? All day, every day, that's in front of us.

[ 18 : 06 ] And we forget that our lives make that statement. No matter whether you do it intentionally or not, you consciously send the message of who matters to you, of who you are loyal to, of who you put first.

That happens with every single choice you make. Choose this day who you will serve. That's a really loaded point.

Because if it's not a conscious thing, if it doesn't actually preoccupy you, if it's not consciously what you decide to do, don't be surprised that it's not what you're doing.

It's hard enough when you choose it. Can you imagine what happens if you don't choose it? But that's that complacency and comfort thing.

Because we start to feel a little too good about how we got here. See, the thing that happens is remember I told you, Joshua saw some of this, most of it that we just read, we saw all of it we just read firsthand.

[ 19 : 25 ] That he was born into slavery in Egypt. And then he saw the coming of the deliverer. He saw the plagues.

He saw the parting of the sea and walked through on the dry land. He waited on the mountain when Moses was coming down with the law. And then he wandered through the desert with the people.

So he knows what's going on. And then he leads the people into the land because Moses dies. And when we talk about all those battles and we talk about all those kingdoms and all those things, Joshua was there.

And now, he's at this place where he's not going to be present in the same way. And for those folks, you know what happens when your memories start to be just memories?

When you can put some time between you and the event? You know what happens when the story just becomes a story? And it's not something you own the same way and it's not close to you?

[ 20 : 45 ] And then people start talking about, hey, remember when God did that? Or hey, remember when that happened? And it's not your story. You don't own it the same way. You don't have it built into your bones and your gut the same way?

Then it loses its urgency. It loses its power. You don't taste it and smell it the same way you did because you don't remember the day the same way. And it's real easy then to start thinking, well, these other things can be more important.

These shinier, more tangible, newer things can start to get more energy and more attention. It's easy for us to fall into that trap. But that's why it's so important.

We have to choose every single day. Who are we going to serve? And if it's not something that speaks to you and if it's not something that matters to you, don't be surprised that your relationship with God ends up falling into that place.

But fortunately for us, God has shown us the way. And it's not just about making a choice. It's about something we can do every day. Right?

[ 22 : 03 ] Because if we really talk about, well, what does it mean to choose who I'm going to serve? What does that look like? Well, let's listen to what Jesus said.

In that passage from Luke, we see a really important lesson. Now, those of you who did the Luke Bible study with me know that we spent a lot of time on that passage.

We talked about that a lot. Right? Y'all know what those of you who were there know we spent a lot of time with that. And we spent a lot of time with it for the following reason. Now, we entered this story at verse 24 where it says, a dispute broke out among them as to who would be the greatest.

Okay? What blew our minds, especially in that study, was what happens just a couple verses before that. Because we are literally just a couple of verses removed from God instituting the Lord's Supper.

Okay? And what happens is that Jesus actually institutes what now for us is Holy Communion. He announces that he's going to be betrayed.

[ 23 : 09 ] The disciples kind of fall into this argument about who's going to do that. And then, a dispute breaks out among them as to who's going to be the greatest. I mean, the thing we talked about in the Bible study, which really still blows my mind, is one of those things, you wonder how much time that actually took.

Right? Like, how many minutes that was. Because you go from this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. This is my blood poured out for you and for the sins of money.

Do this in remembrance of me. The hand of the one who's going to betray me is also on the table. Is it I, Lord? Well, I'm going to be more important in the story than you.

Literally. One, two, three. How long did that take? But that's human.

That's what it means to be human. Right? That's humanity doing what we do. But here's what I want you to catch. Not only do we have that mind-blowing sequence of events, but when this happens, what does Jesus actually teach us?

[ 24 : 20 ] He reminds us of what is relevant for our story today. And that is, when we start thinking about what it means to be great, when we start thinking about what it means to do great things in God's eyes, what does Jesus teach us?

He says, remember, that those of you who would be great, the one among you who would seek to be the greatest, you actually have to be the most humble.

You actually have to give yourself in service. Because that's what greatness looks like from God's point of view. What are you doing for God? What are you doing for others?

Instead of puffing yourself up in this way, greatness from God's point of view is about how well you are loving other people. How well you are loving God.

God's point of view is about God's point of view. Now, given what we're talking about, this idea of accomplishing goals and feeling good about yourself and all of those sorts of things sounds kind of like that idea of falling into greatness, does it not?

[ 25 : 33 ] From the world's point of view. But our challenge then is if we don't want to get complacent, if we don't want to get stuck, we have to choose who we will serve.

And if we are going to serve God, what does that really mean? What does that really look like? Well, it looks like doing these things that serve others.

And when you start to think, whoa, this is getting a little too easy. This is getting a little too comfortable. Things are getting a little too soft. The question you need to start thinking through in your own head is, what am I doing that is lifting up the kingdom?

What am I doing that's stepping into God's plan for me? What am I doing that is a blessing to others? Or am I just sitting here ticking off my list and telling myself how great I am?

See, serving puts the other first. Serving puts God where God belongs. That's our challenge. Because it's easy, especially when you are in crisis, crisis mode.

[ 26 : 45 ] Because that's where the people were. There is an urgent thing that must be done. And so, they move from their time in the Exodus, even though the people who worship the golden calf don't get into the promised land.

Then, the people get into the promised land. And then, they have to actually take the promised land. So, there's this crisis mode piece. But you get there and now, it's happened.

God has made a way just as God promised God would make a way. And now, you are here. So, now what? the challenge becomes, if you have known this, because friends, you could look at your little post-it note, you could look at those notes on your phone, you know that you did not do this by your own sword and bow.

I doubt that anybody in here would make their testimony, look at how great I am. I did all this myself. If that's what you wrote on your post-it note, you didn't understand the question.

Because it said, I remember when God did this for me. And if you know it was God that did those things, will your testimony be, well look at how great I am, or look at how great God is.

[ 28 : 11 ] And if your testimony is, how great is my God? Look at what God has done for me. And you know you have accomplished these things only because of God's grace and mercy.

If you know you didn't get here by yourself. So then the question remains, who will you serve?

Because if you know those things to be true, you'd think the answer would be obvious. So now the challenge is, what will you do? Amen.

And amen. Loving and gracious God, thank you for the ways in which you continue to make a way. You've made a way in our lives so many times.

We know it was you, that we may have done our part, but this is only because you were with us. no matter what our circumstances feel like or look like, we know that you have shown your grace and your power time and time again.

[ 29 : 21 ] So Lord, this day we choose you. We choose you anew. We choose you in a fresh way. We choose you over and over and over. We may stumble.

We may fall. But we choose to follow. So Lord, please, move in us again. Receive our praise.

Receive our hearts afresh. Because we choose you. As for us, we will serve the Lord.

Amen. Amen and amen. Indeed, it starts with each of us. So there are many opportunities for you to live in your faith this week. Hopefully, you got the clipboards as they were moving around for sign-ups for VVS volunteers and roles.

If you didn't see that, there's a station in the back and we will also have those available. You still have time to sign up, but please offer what you can to support our Vacation Bible School this summer. We also have Feeding Hope meal coming up this week, Women of Pendleton coming up this week, as well as an opportunity to support the gathering band as they support our sister church in Amherst Trinity on Saturday coming up.

[ 30 : 37 ] As they support Pastor Jane in the ministry she's leading over there. So all of that's in your bulletin. You have plenty of time to read and follow that. But please look for those opportunities to give of yourself, just as we were pledging, choose who you will serve.

Now our benediction as we leave today is a little longer. It's a promise prayer, one which we speak to God as a sign that we are ready to take that leap forward as we are ready to take that step.

There are responses to it, so I invite you to enter into this prayer with me at this time. The harvest is ready. Whom shall I send? Send me to God.

I'm ready to serve you all the days of my life. Go into the workplace and into the streets and reveal God's saving spirit through the quality of your lives.

The world is waiting. Whom shall I send? Send me to God. God, I am ready to speak with people all the days of my life. Preach the good news by your actions.

[ 31 : 40 ] Heal, help, teach, touch, be of good spirit in good times and bad times and live for the glory of God. The world is hungry.

Whom shall I send? Send me to God. I am ready to emerge all the days of my life. Feed the hungry of body and spirit.

Break the bread of compassion. Distribute the fragments of hope and be fed by the word within you. The vineyard is ready. Whom shall I send? Send me shall I.

I am ready to work with you all the days of my life. Enter into and love the mission and your many ministries. Labor for justice.

Lobby for peace. And may you find contentment in the wages of commitment when the long hard day is done. May we serve the living God and give the way out from the way for all the world.

[ 32 : 42 ] Amen. Now in the name of God our creator and king and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and savior and in the name of the holy spirit our comforter and our sustainer.

May God bless us as we leave the love and serve God and all God's children. Amen.