

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-15

Dear Friends in Christ,

You might recall the story about the fellow talking with an old friend he hadn't seen in years. In the course of the conversation he asked his old friend, "How's your wife?" The friend replied, "She's in heaven." Without thinking, the fellow said, "Oh, I'm sorry." Quickly realizing the poor choice of words he said, "I mean, I'm glad." Realizing that the choice was no improvement he said, "Well, what I mean is I'm surprised." Well, that's a conversation everyone wants to avoid.

The man in the story was conflicted. That word is reflective of the understanding many have of God: *conflicted* - an emotional conflict. I'm talking about God's people. We don't want to be conflicted! We want to declare with Joshua . . .

WE WILL!

I. Our Schechem.

Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Schechem. He summoned all the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel and they presented themselves before God. (v.1)

The purpose of Joshua assembling the tribes of Israel at Schechem was to renew the Old Testament Covenant. The question might be asked, "Why Schechem and what was its significance?" Concerning that moment for Israel, P. E. Kretzmann writes that it was a "gigantic assembly of people at the place which was hallowed by so many memories, ever since the time of Abraham...". (Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Old Testament, Vol. I.*, CPH, p. 401)

Adolph Harstad writes in his commentary, "Schechem was an appropriate place to renew the covenant. The site is rich in salvation history. It is the first place in Canaan mentioned after Abraham arrived in the land." (Harnak, *Joshua*, Saint. Louis, CPH, pl. 235)

So, let's try it this way: Let's say that where we are is our Schechem - this place which is rich in salvation history. This place where Word and Sacrament are administered, where God meets with us week after week and reaffirms His New Testament - His New Covenant - with us; specifically the forgiveness of sin and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. But that's not all. Our Schechem is with us every day in the Scriptures and the faith that dwells in our hearts.

It is as Paul writes: "'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of faith...". (Rom. 10:8) The things of this world that are important to us will turn to dust. Human wisdom can lead nowhere else. Bags of dust! What God gives us is, of course, eternal life in Christ.

And so, we daily stand at Schechem where the Word speaks and we hear these words of Joshua . . .

II. Fear the Lord.

And Joshua said to all the people... "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve...". (vv. 2a,14-15)

The words that call for our immediate attention are "Now therefore fear the Lord...". Fear the Lord! I know it will sound overly simplistic, but Webster gives several definitions of fear, the obvious being "an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger." Then this one: "Profound reverence and awe esp. toward God." And then this one: "reason for alarm." I suggest all three have a place in Joshua's words.

In Psalm 119:120 the Psalmist writes, "My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgements." What's first significant here are the words "My flesh trembles...". Kretzmann writes, "(My flesh trembles for fear of you), particularly when we witness the punishment of the Lord upon the wicked." (Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible, Old Testament, Vol. II, CPH, p. 190.) In child-like terms it's *scary, frightening* !

How about this: Recall The Flood. Recall the world of that time stood together in global agreement accepting anything but God's Word. Recall the words God had Moses write prior to the flood, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Gen. 6:5) And this: "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence." (Gen. 5:11) Anything here ring lots of bells???. What was it Jesus said? "For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." (Matt. 24:37)

In that same Psalm 119:120 the Psalmist writes, "I am afraid of your judgments." I'll go with Kretzmann on this as well. He writes, "*I am afraid of your judgments*), this same holy awe and reverence of the righteous God serving the Christians of all times to keep their flesh in bounds and to shun evil in every form." (Kretzmann, p. 190)

What Joshua said stands today: "And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve...". Nothing has changed. Every generation of God's people must weigh what the world is either suggesting or foisting upon it. Would any blood bought child of God **blindly acquiesce** (reluctantly accept without protest) **to the insane political correctness and social norms** that demand freedom for everything but the right to fall before, follow and serve THE ONLY TRUE GOD Who gave His Son to secure our forgiveness and Heaven???. Our confession cannot falter: "Your word (The Scripture alone!) is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." (Ps. 119:105) - the Scriptures that hit us with "For the wages of sin is death" and, then, lift us to "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23)

The Scriptures alone impress upon us that the Living Triune God is the one who sits above all humanity: "It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers...who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness." (Is. 40:22a & 23) And it is God who declares, "I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host." (Is. 45:12)

The evolutionists/atheists laugh and mock, but the only laughing matter is that of a miserable **this world faith** which believes that the only thing that existed at the beginning was a glob of matter, yet cannot identify how it existed in the first place! Remember the story at the beginning of this sermon about the man who was conflicted about his words? When man becomes his own god there is nothing left but conflict. Look at where our world and culture have progressed to this point in time, as the result.

And get this: Forgiveness is hard to come by from this world. Even Christians tend to re-hash and grind away at the sins of others. But, as the prophet Micah declared, "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? ...he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18-19) This He has done through the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

III. The "We Will".

And that brings us to the clarity and certainty of the moment. Prior to confessing his position Joshua called on the people to "choose this day whom you will serve." Joshua then made his confession: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." What moves us to make the same confession - to choose what Joshua and all the saints and martyrs through history chose is what Paul declared about God's love for us: "... (God) chose us in him before the foundation of the world...for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses...". (Eph. 1:4-7).

Dear friends, God served and serves us. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." (Jn. 10:27-28) He served us at Calvary and serves us today through Word and Sacrament.

Our choices are clear: Either vigorously pursue whatever you think is going to make you a worldly happy and contented person knowing it will lose its shine and joy, will fade and die; worship it and serve it with all your might! Do that or else serve the Living Triune God Who gives life and salvation through Jesus Christ, and then look forward to the eternal Kingdom prepared for us. One or the other! The struggle for middle ground will only lead to conflict and deep sadness.

God help us to stand firm in the confession during these closing days: "But as for me and my house, **we will** serve the Lord." ***We will.***

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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“We Will”

I. Our Schechem.

II. Fear the Lord.

III. The “We Will”.

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