

September 13, 2015

*Joshua 24:14-15: **“Choose for Yourselves”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Quite a few years ago, the newspapers ran a story about a school bus driver who got lost while driving a group of gifted children on an unfamiliar route. In frustration, she returned to the school, dropped the children off at the front steps, and told them, "You're gifted - you figure out how to get home." And that is how some parents deal with the eternal destination of their children. "You figure out how to get home."

Our Old Testament lesson is from the book of Joshua. The whole book is about going home. You will remember that in the book of Genesis the Lord made a promise to Abraham about the land of Canaan. He said, "To your offspring I will give this land (Gen. 12:7)." It was promised land, it was about the future, it was considered home, and so it became a powerful picture of going home to heaven. The writer to the Hebrews states it in this way:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God (Hebrews 11:8-10).

Now, the descendants of Abraham still did not have the land of Canaan when they were slaves in Egypt. After they were delivered from their slavery in Egypt, they didn't even go into the promised land until after wandering in the desert for 40 years, while facing all kinds of hardships. At the end of the 40 years God appointed Joshua to lead Israel across the Jordan into the land. The name "Joshua" is the same name for "Jesus." That is why Luther makes the observation that Joshua serves as a picture of what Jesus would later do for the people. As Joshua leads the people into the promised land, so Jesus our Savior leads us into heaven by living a perfect life for us and by dying on the cross to pay for all of our sins.

Still, in the days of Joshua, the hardships continued, the conquest of Canaan did not happen overnight, nor was it even close to being completed during Joshua's lifetime. Think of it in this way, the Book of Joshua covers only seven years and three campaigns against the people of Canaan. The struggle to occupy the land would last until king David's reign about 400 years later.

When you begin to put all of these things together, it paints a picture. Going home is fraught with all kinds of hardships. We have the promise of heaven, but it feels like a long wait from our perspective. Furthermore, it seems that everything is against our making it home. There was the famine that led the people into Egypt, that led the Egyptians to place them into slavery, and even though God delivered them, they found themselves in a desert struggling with their sinful ways. Even after they cross the Jordan and enter into the promised land of Canaan, the book of Joshua talks about wars and the dangers of living in a land full of unbelievers. The Bible then testifies to a constant struggle between faithfulness and faithlessness when it comes to the people of God. What a ridiculous thing it would be for us to say to our children, "You figure out how to get home." We need the Instruction of the Lord.

Toward the end of Joshua's life, even though a long time had passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, he was very well aware of the fact that there were many dangers ahead for the people. Joshua briefly reviews God's salvation history beginning with Abraham to his own time. He then says this:

"Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in 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, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Joshua 24:14-15)."

Joshua knows what is really at stake. To fear the Lord is not to be terrorized by him. Rather, it is to be a believer in Christ and the forgiveness of sins. To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and it is to push away all that is evil. When we believe that Jesus died for our sins and rose that we might live forever, we understand that apart from him we are nothing and have nothing. We understand that he is everything and from him are all things good. The last thing that anyone of us would want to happen would be to lose Christ and the promise of our heavenly home. It is for this reason that we do not want to be left on our own when it comes to figuring out how to get home. Again, we need the Instruction of the Lord.

Joshua bids us to be servants of the Lord. Being a servant of the Lord doesn't mean to wash his car and mow his lawn, but rather it means to gratefully receive the love that he has given, and in turn love one another. In other words, the love of God is a principled love that keeps us from lovelessness. Having been loved, we remain in love, and we love sincerely and faithfully. The false gods of this life are everywhere around us. And these false gods would drop us off far from home and leave it to us to find our way. The true God doesn't do that to us. False gods would lead us away from home and into a destruction that will never end. Joshua knows the truth as he had seen illustrated through his life. We need God's Word.

In the flesh we have the old self hanging around our necks. In the words of the *Large Catechism*, the flesh works hard and "lures us daily into unchastity, laziness, gluttony and drunkenness, greed and deceit, into acts of fraud and deception against our neighbor – in short, into all kinds of evil lusts which by nature cling to us and to which we are incited by the association and example of other people and by the things we hear and see. All this often wounds and inflames even an innocent heart." Next comes this unbelieving world - for Joshua the sinful nations - all who would try to change the way in which we think to turn us away from the truth. And there is the devil and his schemes. Again, in the words of the *Large Catechism*, "his purpose is to make us scorn and despise both the Word and the works of God, to tear us away from faith, hope, and love, to draw us into unbelief, false security, and stubbornness, or, on the contrary, to drive us into despair, atheism, blasphemy, and countless other abominable sins."

Joshua stands up against all of this and says: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD!" This expression is one of the best known statements of the entire Bible. His words are a bold and unashamed statement of personal commitment to the Lord. Even if he has to stand alone, he will serve the Lord. At the same time, he will use his role as the head of his house to lead those under his care to serve

the Lord. He wants to serve the God who has saved him from sin, death, and the devil. And Joshua realizes that this service can only happen in the service of God to them. He realizes that the last thing that anyone should do is neglect the use of God's holy Word. We need the Lord to guide us in our way.

What is the greatest gift that we can give to our children and to ourselves? It is not a one-time, short-term religious speech, but a continual exposure to the instruction of the Lord at home and at church. This is the type of education that God wanted for his people, and it is the type of education that our Lord wants for us today. What does it say in the book of Deuteronomy? "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

From one generation to the next, God's salvation in Jesus Christ is passed on from one person to the next, from parent to child, from pastor to people, from Christian to Christian, and from Christian to Unbeliever. Again and again, the account of God's love for us in Jesus Christ is spoken. We teach our children diligently in our homes just like grandmother Lois and mother Eunice passed on the gospel to Timothy who would one day be a pastor.

Long after you and I are gone and our children have raised their children and have prayerfully seen their children come also the baptism font of life, nothing will matter except that we taught our young ones to know Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin and that we remained in Christ through the means of grace. Nothing else will matter except that we made it home . . . home to heaven. There is much against us. Joshua saw it. That is why he said to the people, and he says to us "Choose For Yourselves."

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott