

Joshua's Final Acts, Pt. 2.  
"The renewing of the covenant."  
Joshua 24:14-25  
Sunday evening, November 14, 2010.

A number of ingredients go into this covenant renewal enacted by Joshua as a final act of national importance prior to his death. These words and proceedings should be weighty for us, as the final words and actions of believers, in the face of their departure from this world, are not, and ought not to be frivolous ones.

## I. The call.

There is a calling of the people; not only a calling them together, but a calling, and an urging them back to the Lord.

### A. Why would such a thing even be necessary?

1. They had seen God's works in Egypt; His wonderful provision in the wilderness; they ate the manna and drank from the rock. They had passed through the Red Sea.
2. Furthermore they had seen how God dealt with those who flagrantly disobeyed Him; they had seen and experienced His judgments.
3. In more recent times they had experienced God's power in the conquest of Canaan. They had passed through the Jordan as on dry land, and they had seen the sun and moon stand still; and they had seen enemies far more powerful than they defeated.

### B. The stubbornness of the evil of idolatry.

1. We see in our text that notwithstanding all Israel had seen and experienced, they continued to be very prone to gravitate toward the practice of idolatry.
2. In vs. 14 and 15 three kinds of idols are mentioned:
  - The gods the fathers served on the other side of the river (Mesopotamia). These go all the way back to the days of Jacob and his family. Rachel brought these with her when they went to the land of Israel. Genesis 31:34. Jacob's children and their families served these as is evident from Genesis 35:1,2.
  - In Egypt they had begun to add the Egyptian deities to their worship practices.
  - Now that they lived in the land which was dispossessed from the Amorites and Canaanites, they started to serve their deities as well.
3. Later in our passage, in Vs. 19 Joshua gives additional insights in the nature of this evil.

## II. The choice.

Joshua puts choice before God's people in the words: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve..."

Why did Joshua even give the people a choice; why did he not simply command them, as their leader, to serve the Lord?

- ### A.
- It is because the Lord does not enslave His people; He sets His people free. The Lord did not redeem His people out of Egypt to enslave them to Himself, and to

bring them into an estate of forced labor and service to Himself.

- B. If the Lord is to be served at all, He is to be served voluntarily. Our union is a voluntary union, and that includes the possibility of going astray from Him.
- C. It is still that way today. The Lord will not enslave you. Our union with Him is one of love on His part, and it ought to be so on our end as well. If it is of love it is of a voluntary nature.
- D. Why does the Lord punish us then when we go astray?  
Only with the Lord is there provision and protection in abundance. When we remove ourselves from the protection and provision of our father's house, we expose ourselves to the hostile and destructive powers of darkness, and we inherit the provisions of the Evil One, rather than those of the Lord, for us.
- E. This is the meaning of the NT language of "committing such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh..." 1 Corinthians 5:5 and 1 Timothy 1:20.  
This principle and process is best illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son.

### III. The Conundrum. (riddle or perplexing thing).

The people, upon reviewing all they've been through, walking with the Lord, rightfully conclude that the only reasonable thing to do is to continue with the Lord, and to serve Him, living in covenant with Him.

Why does Joshua at this point, when the people are ready to commit themselves to serve the Lord, raise a terribly discouraging objection in saying: "You can not serve the Lord..." Why does he not simply seal the deal and move to renew the Lord's covenant with them? What kind of pastoral practice is this?

- A. It is the practice of brutal honesty. The human heart is an idol factory; it seeks its satisfaction, it sets its desires, it finds its pleasure, it bases its hope, and it finds its comfort constantly in the creation and the creature rather than in the Creator. Our idols are more sophisticated than those of the days of Joshua, but they function the same way. They steal our hearts and hopes away from the Creator and give them to the creation and the creature.
- B. It is not in the power of man to bring about a change in this. As the law of gravity pulls us down to earth, so the law of sin pulls us down into idolatry.
- C. The results are ever the same: The Lord is grieved and offended, and He withdraws His grace and favor from us. We become alienated from Him, and He moves to do us harm rather than good. In NT language, "For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep..." 1 Corinthians 11:30.
- D. This state of affairs reduces us to being mere beggars for the Lord's mercy to be kept from idols, for we will not keep ourselves. Here is the truth: No matter how much grace and mercy you have received in the past from the Lord, left to yourself you will gravitate back into idolatry in a heartbeat, or in the words of Joshua: "You can not serve the Lord." (That is on your own.)

### IV. The covenant.

In the end Israel made the right choice; they chose the Lord and His covenant.

What else is there; for them then, or for us now? But it would not last for them, or for us, unless it is accompanied by the humility that seeks discernment and keeping grace from the Lord.