

SERMON PREACHED ON

Sunday, November 6, 2005

THE THEME: Jesus is our treasure!

TEXT: Joshua 24:14-16, 23-24

*"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the 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 forefathers served 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." Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!" . "Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him."*

Dear fellow blood-bought children of God and heirs unto eternal life,

### INTRODUCTION

What's in your wallet? This is a phrase that has gotten only too well known or maybe over heard as a commercial jingle. It is the phrase, "What's in your wallet?" In these commercials you will be told that if you do not have the right kind of credit card in your wallet, the fees and interest rates will attack you like a hoard of barbarians. Or you will be told that only with this particular credit card you will not hear the resounding "NO" when it comes to cashing in your credit card points.

Well our God wants us to think more seriously of our indebtedness to Christ than about accumulating any kind of credit card debt. He wants us to daily hear and answer the question, "What's in your heart?" Or "What's in your life?"

In the same way that God does not need to ask us the question, "What's in your wallet?" since he already knows. So also God does not need to ask, "What's in your heart", since again he already knows. Rather, he asks us this question of what's in our hearts for our benefit and for our own good. Certainly, what our God wants us to consider and think about concerning our hearts is of greater significance than whatever could be in our wallets. Jesus reminded us in his sermon on the mount, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). May we see today:

OUR PRIORITY, Jesus is our treasure.

1. Which treasure are you choosing?
2. How do you make known this priority?

### PART 1

As a model of one who regularly put our Savior-God first and foremost in his life, we look at Joshua. We can hardly find an individual in the scriptures, who is more resolved and more dedicated to putting God and his commands first. He stands as an example of one who consistently gave faithful and dedicated service to the Lord. At the time in which God chose Joshua to fill the role of Moses, Joshua was less than thrilled to take on

all the responsibility and grief that went along with it. He had only seen too often, the rebellion and opposition God's people had shown to Moses. He did not campaign or pursue such a position of leadership. But God chose him and blessed him with a promise. He told him to pay attention to God's commands and to obey him without question. He spelled it out for Joshua saying, "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). In the life of Joshua, it becomes clear that he took God's word of promise to heart. He ate those words. He digested those words. He lived those words. Even now in this well-known farewell sermon, which serves as our sermon text today, Joshua made clear that God kept his word and made good on his promise. You see, Joshua is speaking to the leadership of Israel in the city of Shechem, the same location that Abraham first stopped to build an altar to God after his calling to the Promised Land. After nearly five centuries, they were now physical witnesses to God's inerrant word.

Consider how Joshua showed forth his reliance upon God's commands and the simple fact that God knows best. Even when God told Joshua to do something that seemed less than normal for a leader, ruler or general, as he was, he did it without question or hesitation. Because God said so was simply good enough. Remember the falling of Jericho to the army of Joshua. What military leader in any present army would concede to marching his army around a city once for six consecutive days, and then on the seventh day do this seven times followed by the blast of trumpets? Joshua did this without hesitation, because God said so. God handed the mighty city of Jericho over to Joshua, just as he had promised. Again and again, Joshua demonstrated a faithful adherence to the word and command of God.

Now in this farewell speech, Joshua urges God's people to go and do likewise. He tells them to not let the influences of the Canaanite people, and the pressure of their idol-worshipping neighbors, crowd out their love for the LORD. Joshua is using truly effective leadership to produce good and God-pleasing results. His leadership is not one of force and influence and intimidation. His leadership is simply done with a living example of Godly character and wise choices. He led by example!

He first drew attention to God's goodness. For they had all realized the fulfillment of God's promise in giving them the Promised Land. They were the living beneficiaries of God's amazing grace. Consider today, how our lives have similarly been richly blessed. Consider what we recalled last Sunday, with the celebration of the Reformation. Consider the battles that have been fought to preserve our faith and doctrine. Martin Luther was God's tool and instrument to keep God's people in God's Word. By God's power these battles have been won for our benefit here and now. As we now consider such blessings that have been poured into our lap, take hold of those numerous opportunities to say thank you to our giving and gracious God.

First, turn away from the self-serving attitude that thinks God owed these or any blessings to us in the first place. Do not cave to the temptations of Joshua's day, to shirk and overlook God's goodness and to trivialize God's grace. In so doing we will have robbed God of the glory, honor and credit that is due him.

When we give undo attention or priority to the things of this world, we allow them to also take God's place. This is the idolatry Joshua so warned the Israelites. God clearly wants absolute undivided allegiance. He will not share the people's affection with any false god. He will not tolerate any rival to his throne. In Joshua's day, there were any number of false god's, even brought over from Egypt (as our text mentions). What or who is rivaling your allegiance to God? Seek God's forgiveness and strength to resist!

In short, every sin committed can be whittled down to the breaking of this First Commandment of God, "You shall have no other gods". We easily succumb to serving self, to serving the gift rather than the Giver, to serving the creation rather than the Creator, to serving the blessings rather than the One who so blesses us. (Hedonism and materialism are clear examples that still hit home for us.) Within the idolatrous atmosphere that Joshua refers to, using temple prostitutes was a real temptation for the men of Israel. Sexual immorality pervades and permeates our society, no less. Sexual activity has been degraded to a mere recreation, carried on outside the boundaries of marriage.

Within this context, we are told to make a clear choice. Please, do not be troubled or confused into thinking that Joshua is inviting individuals to make a decision of faith. That is not possible. God chose us, we could not choose him. In fact, Joshua was not even talking to unbelievers needing to come to faith. He is already speaking with God's chosen people, blessed with a faith in the promise of a Savior to come. So then, their choice must be a desire to serve the Lord and show their faith. As we wake up each morning, God places choices before us in the course of each day. May we follow the lead of Joshua who set the clear standard with these words, "As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

## PART 2

As Joshua did not hesitate to set an example for others to follow, may we realize that there is someone else in our lives that we are able to influence, by setting a personal example for them to follow. The saying that "A picture is worth a thousand words" is equally true of the lives that we show to others. That is clearly a tremendous responsibility. There is truly no way we can ask or compel others to do something that we ourselves have not, or are not doing.

This encouragement of Joshua is a call for each one of us to improve our living service to the Lord. We individually and collectively have room for improvement. Such improvement starts with Jesus being our treasure. He alone put us first in his life, in his death and by his resurrection. Indeed, if any one of us were the only person on this planet, Jesus would have still come to save us from the hell we deserve. His love is so boundless, that it compelled him to save us for heaven, so that he might continue to love us for an eternity.

Therefore, we will want to be earnest in our service to the Lord. Talk is cheap. Joshua even called into question the promise of God's people to do likewise (in serving the

Lord). Words must be followed up by action. We must not let the things of this world crowd out the surpassing love of God. I recently read of how often the sports team with the greater time of possession will win (especially true in hockey and football). Within your week, who is dominating and possessing your time of possession? Indeed, the responsibilities to your job and family are apparent. But time with God in his word and in worship must be non-negotiable.

### CONCLUSION

God in Christ has won for each one of us a place with him in his heaven. Our time there will include more responsibility and more opportunity to serve God perfectly. I was recently reminded that our time in heaven will not be like the eternal stay at a big rest home in the sky. Heaven will be an ongoing life of sinless and joyous worship and praise directed to our Savior God. In truth, as God's people, we don't have to wait till we die to start serving God faithfully. What we as Christians do here and now is practice for what we get to do forever in heaven! What a tremendous joy it is to know that God has made us his treasure. He has assured us of this truth by our baptism and in his word of promise. Indeed, his gift of faith cements within our hearts that while every soul is a treasure, Jesus is our greatest treasure.

Amen.