

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Joshua 24:12-18 at Victory of the Lamb on May 29th.

Series: Real-ationships Make All the Difference

Today's Focus: The Home

“Serve the LORD. Draw Some Lines. Leave a Legacy.”



In my home we have this cross on a wall outside our bedrooms upstairs {pic}. Can you read what it says? **“As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”** How many of you have heard this verse before? It’s a well-known Bible verse among Christians. You can find it on coffee mugs and picture frames and pens and all sorts of things like this. How many of you have something in your homes with this verse on it?

But do you know that it’s from the book of Joshua in the Old Testament? Do you know the context? Joshua was the leader of the Israelites who took over after Moses died. Moses had led the people out from slavery in Egypt. Joshua had led the people across the Jordan River to take possession of the land of Canaan. Now Joshua is soon going to die. And in chapter 24, the last chapter of the book of the Bible that bears his name, Joshua is giving his farewell sermon to the people. He is thinking about the spiritual legacy that he is going to leave for generations to come. And right before he says this famous line, **“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD”**... he gives the people a mini history lesson.

Actually it’s God giving the people a history lesson through Joshua and here’s just the tail end of it. God says: **12 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. 13 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.’**

So the summary here is basically this: God is saying, “Look what I’ve done for you. You didn’t deserve all this. You can’t take credit for all this.” And without spending a lot of time walking through all the details, I just want you to notice something. Before Joshua says that famous line: **“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD”**, what does God say? 18 times in the first 13 verses God says, “I.” *“I have given you all these blessings. I have done all these things for you.”* In other words before we could ever start to draw some lines in our lives against the surrounding culture and say, **“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD”** we need to learn how God has served us. We all need to understand, appreciate, and take to heart what God has done for us.

What’s God done for us? Well on this Memorial Day weekend I would be willfully ignorant if I failed to point out some things about the land in which we live—a land that most of us cannot take

credit for. I mean did any of you say, “I want to be born into the richest, freest nation in the history of the world and have so much stuff I don’t know what to do with it all”? It’s not a country without its problems, but it’s still a good and blessed land, isn’t it? It’s a land that was founded on principles unheard of in the history of the world with freedoms like the freedom of speech and religion. Dare we forget the blood of servicemen and women that has been spilled to procure and to protect and to preserve these freedoms over the years?

Dare we fail to acknowledge God as the source of all our continued blessings despite the wrongs that have been committed, despite the rise of secularism that wants to remove God from every sphere of public life and policy, despite our ingratitude or apathy and all that we ourselves have done or failed to do? Dare we fail to thank and praise God for the willing sacrifices of those brave souls who’ve made the ultimate sacrifice so that we might be free, that we might have the opportunity to gather publicly to worship God today without fear, that we might enjoy a backyard barbecue with family and friends tomorrow? We are certainly reaping the benefits of divine favor and the willing service of those who’ve made the ultimate sacrifice for us. For this we ought to thank and praise our gracious God. We enjoy so many blessings we do not deserve and which we did not earn.

But even more, friends, what has God done for us in his grace that we could never take credit for? He has given us his dear Son, Jesus Christ, as the once-for-all atoning sacrifice for our sins. As the saying goes, “Only two defining forces have ever offered to die for you. The American soldier and Jesus Christ. One died for your freedom. The other died for your soul.” How much credit can we take for the fact that Jesus willingly offered his life on the cross to go into battle for our immortal souls to ransom us from the clutches of sin, death, and the power of devil? Absolutely none.

Joshua led the children of Israel across the Jordan River into the Promised Land of Canaan. But Jesus Christ leads us across the threshold of death into the Promised Land of heaven. There in heaven now awaits our inheritance, freely given by God’s grace but bought with the precious blood of God’s own Son, Jesus Christ, who made the ultimate sacrifice. There in heaven is our true, eternal home where no disappointment will ever spoil our joy and where no difficult relationship will ever ruin another moment. Through the water and word of holy baptism our real citizenship is there in heaven. Dare we forget? Or dare we throw it all away because it now sometimes seems too difficult, or too inconvenient, or too embarrassing to serve the LORD in our modern world that no longer has a sense of shame and offers endless substitutes for the worship of the one, true God? This is why Joshua says:

¹⁴ “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ 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.

So the idea here is this. In every land, among every culture, within every family of origin there are idols. There are false gods that we are tempted to trust or obey or make sacrifices for because they offer us false promises of happiness or security or an easier path through life. There were false gods in Mesopotamia (the land beyond the Euphrates River). There were false gods in Egypt. The Amorites had their fair share of idols too. Friends, what do you this means...are there American idols? Are there idols in your home? Were their false gods in your family growing up that now impact your relationships with other people today?

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. Jesus once said that money or affluence can easily become a false god that we look to for security or happiness. But he said you cannot serve both God and money (Mt. 6:24). Friends, the stakes are high. I think one of the biggest idols in our world today is our reliance upon and use of technology. Of course technology can be a blessing of God. But does your use of technology give glory to God or is the devil using it to destroy your relationship with God? Is your use of technology helping you grow closer to your family so that you have more opportunities to spend time together and communicate about what's really important or is it distracting you from important conversations about Jesus and driving you farther apart?

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. *Choose* means we're going to need to draw some lines in our homes—to say no to certain things, to certain people, to certain pursuits, and to certain patterns of behavior that can become false gods if we give in to them or look to them or let them control us. What are those things in your life that are causing your relationships to suffer—your vertical relationship with God, and your horizontal relationships with the people in your home? **Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.**

Of course we live in a world of choices, don't we? And certainly in one sense this is a blessing. We have choices, variety! Many of these choices don't really matter and we're foolish to fight relational battles over them. For example I might save a few dollars shopping at this grocery store instead of that one, but then again I might spend a little more on gas to go to that store instead of this one. So it's a toss up. There are pros and cons. Plenty of decisions in life are like this. They aren't worth conflict in your home. To have healthy relationships in your home everyone needs to compromise on things that aren't commanded or forbidden by God. What silly thing have you been foolishly arguing about that you just need to compromise on?

On the other hand, some choices can have long lasting spiritual ramifications. They impact our legacy for generations. And so they require us to draw some lines. Do I choose to add this or that activity to the calendar which means skipping church again? If so what is that saying about the priority level I'm giving God? Do I choose to hang out with those people or let these influences into

my life when I know I'm going to be tempted to give in and possibly do things that harm both by my body and my soul?

And parents, while we're talking about drawing lines, it just needs to be said that this is one of your primary jobs as parents. This summer are you just going to let your kids choose what video games they play, choose what YouTube videos they watch, who they snapchat with, what books they read, where they go on the internet, without your supervision or without having conversations about what is God-pleasing and good? Are you just going to let them have unlimited access to whatever form of entertainment they want? If so you're not teaching them discernment. You know what discernment is? It's the learned skill of drawing some lines, guided by God's Word, of distinguishing right from wrong, good from evil. Children will not learn biblical discernment from the internet or the media or even public education. You need to teach them where to draw the lines and that includes leading by your example.

Friends, in light of all that God has done for us, he wants us to make a choice today—a choice to serve him because he has given us the proof of his everlasting love. This is what God's Word is teaching us to do and the good news is that it's what, by God's grace, we can do because it's for our eternal good. Even if you are just beginning today, it's never too late to start. *Serve the LORD. Draw some lines. Leave a legacy.*

¹⁶ Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! ¹⁷ It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. ¹⁸ And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God."

Take Home and Apply

Think: Real success comes not by my own effort, but by Christ's cross.

Share: "But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15b).

Challenge: Where do you need to draw some lines in your home life in order to serve the LORD? Identify at least one "false god" you need to "throw away" in order to leave a legacy of faith. Hint: What in your life do you make sacrifices for, hoping that it will bring you great blessings, at the expense of your worship life, prayer life, or family time gathered around God's Word?