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JOSHUA 24:1-24

Every single morning when we come here we do a Bible study. What we do is we open up the Bible and we read a passage in the Bible, actually read it out of the text, and then what we're doing is looking for some application for our lives. Because we don't just read it as a history book, we read it knowing that the Bible says of itself that it's *living and active*. What that means is if I read it today I'm going to get an application for my life today. Now I might read the same passage tomorrow and get a different application. Because the Bible's alive. It's living and active.

That's why I want you to have a Bible in your hand so you can read along with us and see where it is so God can speak to you. He's not just speaking through me; He's speaking to you in your own heart as we read the scripture.

I'm going to read a passage out of the Old Testament today because there's an application in there that's just so strategic for us. I want you to see it. There's a story that takes place in the Old Testament and there's special instructions that are given to those people and they are also special instructions for us that we can apply to ourselves.

Open your Bibles to Joshua 24. Now if you're not familiar with the Bible, it's the sixth book of the Old Testament, it's the last chapter in that book, Joshua 24. If you have an electronic Bible it's a little easier to find. So just find it there and you'll be fine.

I want you to look at Joshua 24 and we're going to read. Let's start. The first verse says this: *Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.*

"Let's have a meeting," they said. Joshua calls all the people. We're going to have a meeting and he's going to share something really important. The same message he's going to share with them is going to apply to our lives.

But let me give you some background to the story so you understand where we're coming into the picture here. Joshua was the leader that God chose to lead the Israelites from their wilderness wanderings into the Promised Land in order to give them the land. And that's what he's going to do. He leads them through. Twenty-five years ago they came in, they conquered Jericho, they went throughout the land, conquered the land, and now we're at the end of that time twenty-five years later and Joshua's calling this meeting and he's going to share some very specific things with them.

Those people experienced challenges and temptations in their lives, just like we do. Challenges and temptations in our lives. We experience them on a regular basis. Are we going to be able to handle them? Are we going to know how to deal with that? So the challenge that he gives to them is very important. It's going to increase their productivity. It's going to protect them. It's going to keep them on the straight path that they need to stay on. And that same information that he shares with them is going to do the same thing to you.

In fact, I would suggest you young people if you get a glimpse of this when you're young it's going to be strategic for you going forward. It's going to help you avoid a lot of problems that a lot of other people get into if you can follow what this passage says.

Verse 14 and 15 are going to be the application where he's taking us, but before that we're going to read the background. So go into verse 2 with me and let's just read along there what it says.

Verse 2 says, *Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his family went down to Egypt.'"*

So he's recounting their spiritual history, their heritage, where they had come. Because they had a history that has God all in it. Some of you don't have that kind of history where your parents were involved with God. They did. So he's giving them a description of some of these things so they would understand this. He's just recounting their spiritual history.

Let's go on to verse 5. This is the exodus, the same thing in the movie. Well, the real thing. This is the story in the Bible.

Verse 5: *"Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. When I brought your people out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. But they cried to the Lord for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the wilderness for a **long** time."* That's what it says there. It was forty years. A **long** time he lived in the wilderness. That's very true.

I think he's just reminding them now. He hasn't gotten to the application yet. He hasn't got the message I want you to hear yet that's for us, but he's just recounting, getting them ready for it by telling them their spiritual history to remind them of what's going on. It's exciting to see God work. If they think back and see that God has worked in their lives, it's going to mean something very significant to them. It's exciting to watch God work. Do you agree with that?

I was working with a young man recently. He's fifteen years old and he came into my office and I asked him, like I often ask young people, "Why are you here?" He says, "I'm addicted to video games." That was a very honest statement of him to say that.

So I said to him, “Do you want to get well?”

Now the reason I ask him, “Do you want to get well?” comes from a Bible story. I told him, “Let me tell you why I asked the question.”

In John 5 there’s a story about a man who was sick for thirty-eight years. He was crippled. He was lame for thirty-eight years. Jesus came up to him and asked him this question, “Do you want to get well?”

Now I said, “Why do you think Jesus would ask him that question ‘do you want to get well’ if he’d been sick for thirty-eight years. Don’t you think he’d want to get well?” I think sometimes people don’t want to get well. They like being sick. Because if they’re sick then they’ve got people carrying them around on the mat, bringing food to him, all these things. If he gets well, he’s going to have to get his own job, he’s going to have to cook his own food, clean his own house. He’s going to do all kinds of things. He’s going to have to change. That’s the key word.

“I’m going to ask you the question again,” I said to this young man. “Do you want to get well?” He said, “Yes.”

I said, “Good. Did you know that the Christian life is more exciting than video games?”

He laughed! He said, “I don’t think so.”

I said, “You’ve got to be kidding me! Oh, I understand why. You didn’t get the upgrade. See, I’ve got the upgrade. You’ve got to get this. This is really valuable. You’ve just got Christianity 101. That’s where you learn about God, Jesus, the Bible, church. You learn those things in Christianity 101. But when you get the upgrade, amazing things happen. It’s called Christianity server version. And when you get Christianity server version then you learn some different things because then you serve God and when you do that it is so amazing. It’s not the beta version. It’s the real thing.”

I said, “See, here’s what happens. When you’ve got Christianity server version you wake up every day inside the video game. So you’re going around with this anticipation of what’s God going to do next and you’re watching and waiting for Him to do something. It’s really powerful.

You know how in your video game you have to get some energy by going to get this energy and then you use that to conquer whatever you’re doing? The same thing’s true with Christianity server version. You go and get your energy every morning by praying and reading the Bible. You get that energy and then you’re looking around in the course of the day – how’s God going to use this in my life? And then when your mom gets angry now, you don’t just react to her. Now you’re wondering, what’s God doing in this situation? So you’re asking different questions about life.

This is amazing,” I said. “I’ve had Christianity server version for several years. It is great. But not just me. There are lots of other people who have testimonies of Christianity server version. You’ve got to get it. You’ve got to get the upgrade.”

I said, “Did you know that life is like a video game?” Look. You’re fifteen. Do you want to live in your parents’ house when you get to be an adult?”
“No way,” he said.

See, that’s a God-given thing inside of young people that says they want to be independent. I think that’s great.

I said, “Well, you’ve got a problem. Because life is like a video game and to be independent you have to be at about Level 50. You’re probably about Level 10 right now. If you’re going to advance in a video game, when you get a video game if you’re on Level 1 then you have to learn new information, new skills, face challenges, and then when you’re done facing those challenges you get to go to Level 2.”

Right? Isn’t that right? Some of you play video games. You know that. Information, skills, challenges – you get to go to the next level.

I said, “Life is like that. And you’re at about Level 10. In order to get to Level 50 you’ve got to get new information, skills, you’ve got to meet challenges in order to get to the next level.

Here are some things that you’ve got to learn because you’re going to learn they’re really hidden in family life. What you’re going to do is you’re going to learn how to follow instructions when you don’t feel like doing it. That’s something you know at Level 50. You don’t know that at Level 10. You’re going to have to learn how to accept ‘no’ as an answer without blowing up. You’re going to have to be corrected without reacting to the correction, blaming somebody else for the problem. You’re going to have to learn how to manage your finances. I don’t mean take money and spend it. I mean learn how to manage the money. You’re going to have to learn how to do that. You’re going to have to learn how to make decisions.

At each one of the levels as you’re proceeding in your life, in the video game, you’re going to incorporate God in that and God’s going to do some amazing things in your life. You’re going to learn how to take that faith and it’s going to empower you to be able to stay on the right track and do what you need to do.”

Being a Christ-follower is much more exciting than playing a video game. Amen? I’m not sure you’re convinced either, but it is definitely true. I’m telling you, it is true!

Let me continue in the story. Go to verse 8 in Joshua 24. “*I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.*”

Look at those last words there – *I delivered you out of his hand*. Now each one of these represents a faith story in their lives. God had obviously been working in their history before this moment. Just like he’s been working in your history to bring you to where you are today at this

time. God has been working in your history, whatever it is. Some of you have a faith background, some of you don't. But you come and God has been working in your life. You can count on it and He's brought you to this place where you are today in your life.

Verse 11: *“Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands.”*

I'm not going to go into each one of these stories, but you just need to know each one of these stories are real stories and these stories you can go and learn more about and they would help you understand them.

But notice the last phrase there – *but I gave them into your hands*. See, sometimes I think we think, “I've done all the work. I've got myself where I am today.” No, no, no. God is very much involved in the process. Certainly we work hard and we do things. But God is the one who brings us to where we need to be.

Verse 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. I mean, don't think that you got where you are just because of you. God is involved in your life. 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.’* These are all blessings that the Lord has provided you.

Having said all those things, now he's going to get to the application that I think is so valuable for my life and for your life. It's verses 14 and 15.

Look at verse 14. Here's his conclusion to his sermon that he's giving there for us. *“Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness.”* Everything was “I did this, I did that.” Now he's saying here's what you need to do: *Serve him with all faithfulness.*

The word *serve* is going to be used thirteen times between now and verse 24. I like to say Christianity server version. In the next eleven verses we're going to see *serve* used thirteen times.

Here it says, *Fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness.* He develops that in the next sentence. Look at that. *Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.*

So make a choice, is what he's saying. There's a lot of gods out there. He's saying serve God. Serve the God we're talking about here. Notice how the word *Lord* is capitalized there and back in verse 14 the word *gods* is small?

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. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

See, Joshua had upgraded to the Christianity server version. It wasn't called Christianity back then, but he'd upgraded to the server version. He knew what it was like. The last twenty-five years he'd watched people in the land and he'd seen some people who'd go off and do their own thing and get themselves in all kinds of trouble. He sees other people who serve the Lord and amazing things happen in their lives.

He's saying, "Look guys. Choose today whom you're going to serve. Make a choice. You've got all these choices that are out there." He's giving three choices. Do you see the choices there? He's saying you can try to *serve the gods beyond the Euphrates*. Those are the ones from his great-grandparents who didn't love the Lord. They didn't know God. Same thing's true with many of us or distant relatives. They didn't even know God. You could go and try to be like them or he says you could be like them and serve the gods that they have or you can serve *the* God.

Serve the Lord. That's why it's capitalized. Basically he's saying there's only one way. There's only one way for you to be successful. And that's to serve God, the God who created you.

That's a very different statement than many people can accept today. Jesus said something similar in John 14. He said this about Himself, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" That's pretty exclusive. Some people have a hard time with the idea that this is exclusive. They have more of a shopping mall mentality of faith.

They say, "Well, there's a lot of different kinds of faith." I kind of like shopping at the Gap or I like shopping at Macy's and those clothes are fine for me, those clothes are fine for somebody else, and I'll just take those on. They have the same mentality when it comes to faith and they'll say, "I'll take this kind of faith, I'll take that kind of faith," and they think that is sufficient for them.

The problem is there is a lot of fake stuff out there. There are a lot of idols. We're talking about the God who created us. We're talking about the situation in our lives and there's only one God. There's only one true God. There's a lot of small g's, a lot of fake gods, idols that you can worship. He's saying choose today what you're going to do.

Some people say this: "Well I don't believe that. Here's what I believe." And so they talk about what they believe as if they're making this statement that says, "If I don't believe in your God then it doesn't exist." Well that's foolishness. To just say, "I only believe in something, and if I believe in it it's real and if I don't believe in it it isn't real," then that's just silly.

If a video game creator creates a game and you enter the game and you've got to get out of Level 1 by beating this challenge and another guy's trying to get you, you can't say, "I don't believe in that. I'm going to plant flowers." It doesn't work that way. You're going to get killed in the video game.

There's only one way the video game works and that's to get to the next level you've got to conquer that challenge to get to the next level. You can't say, well I'm just going to go meditate in the corner over here in the video game. You're going to get killed in the video game. The

same thing's true in life. There is one God and that one God is the one spoken of here that Jesus talked about. It's that one God and there's one way. He created you and He knows how you're made.

Now there are a lot of fake things out there and some people try to get involved in those fake things, but they're not true. There's only one true God. You've got to ask yourself that question because a lot of people think, "If I believe in this it must be true." No, that's not true. That's just silliness.

Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" So we as Christians, we're not believers first, we're truth-seekers first, and then we believe. Some people say this: "If I believe in something it makes it true." We say, "It's true – that's why we believe in it."

If you're believing in something that's not true, that belief doesn't make it true, it just means that you're making a mistake. You're believing in something that isn't correct.

Joshua is saying, "Get rid of the fake gods and serve God only." That's what he's saying and that's his invitation, verses 14 and 15. An invitation to all of us, I think, that we need to serve God 100%. That's our job. We need to know that God, who He is, and serve Him with our whole lives.

Notice the response. I think this is fascinating as we continue the story. Look at verse 16. *Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! 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.*

We know that God's been working in our lives. He's done all these things. *He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. 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.*"

So we know who the true God is because our parents served Him. We know that. So we're going to serve Him. That's what they're saying.

Notice Joshua's response. I love this. *Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins."*

Whoa. See what we tend to do is we say, "Come get to know God," and a person just responds and we go, "Okay, you're in!" But Joshua's saying let me just help you understand the importance of the decision you're making. I don't think you realize what this really means. Make sure you understand this because this is really big. This is God we're talking about and He doesn't mess around.

Sometimes we just imagine or we just think about God as a loving God. And He is a very loving God. We read about that in the Bible. But Joshua is drawing attention to the fact that He's holy. That means there's an exclusive way to get to Him and to understand who He is. He has a plan. I

think sometimes we ask the wrong questions about God. We almost view Him like a cosmic Santa Claus or something. “God, will you give me this and will you give me that?” I think we ask the wrong questions in that case and sometimes we get disappointed.

I think we need to ask this question: God, what are you doing in the world? What is your plan? And how can I serve you? How can I be involved in what you’re doing? That’s the question to be asked and that’s what Joshua is saying.

Let’s go on and see how Joshua continues when he says in verse 20 – *If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.*”

But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the Lord.” See, they’ve had time to ponder the question a little bit here. Now they’re saying, “Yes, this is what I want.”

So notice Joshua’s response in verse 22. *Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord.”* In other words, let’s make sure you’ve got this. You’re sure this is really what you want to do? Because this decision that you make to serve the Lord is going to change the rest of your life. Nothing is going to be the same when you leave here today.

Verse 22 continues – *“Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.*

Verse 23: *“Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.”*

Do you see what Joshua is saying? He’s saying, “You guys want to serve the Lord? Show me. Show me by getting rid of those other idols that you have. Show me that you’re going to follow me with all of your heart.” *Yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.* Just so we understand who the Lord is, he clarifies it. The God of Israel. This is the God we’re talking about. One God that exists. Show me, he says.

I think some people think, “Well, if I’m a Christian that means I wear a Christian t-shirt or I put some jewelry on.” That’s not what we’re talking about here. We’re talking about a call to commitment, a call to serve the Lord with all of your heart. That’s what he’s saying.

I think a lot of people don’t understand this idea of heart. You see the word *heart* in verse 23? *Yield your heart to the Lord.* When you do that, then God speaks to you in your heart. Some people just don’t really understand that.

I was working with a six-year-old boy two weeks ago. He’s having a problem at school and not paying attention in school, so he gets himself in trouble. So I’m going to help him. I’m going to teach him about the conscience, teach him about the Holy Spirit prompting his heart to do the right thing. That’s what I’m going to do.

So I said, “Okay. Stand up in front of me, put your hands down to your sides, relax. Good. That’s good. Do you see right here? There’s a heart there and your heart speaks to you.”
He says, “I know.”

It is a Christian family. I’m thinking oh good! His parents have taught him about the heart and how the heart speaks.

I said, “Great! What does your heart say?”
He says, “When I listen quietly it says buh-bum, buh-bum, buh-bum.”

So I went on to tell him about how the heart really says things like do the right thing. And so as we work together we’re going to help him experience the promptings of his heart and the promptings of his heart are going to be stronger than his urges to do the wrong thing. We’re going to see him concentrate and pay attention in school. Because I want him to see that his faith at six years old is strategic for him in dealing with something so mundane as that.

I was working with a thirteen-year-old boy last year. Fun story. This thirteen year old is mean to his brother and disrespectful to his mom. I had been working with him for a few weeks now. “We’re not seeing much progress,” Mom says.

So he comes into my office and I said to him this, which is what I say to a number of young people when they come in. I say, “Well, is it better, worse, or the same?”
He says, “The same.” That’s bad news for me because I want to see progress and I’m not seeing progress.

I said, “What are you working on?”
He says, “I’m working on being kind to my brother and being respectful to my mom.”
I said, “Great. Are you a Christian?”
He said, “Yes,” and he looks at me like why are you asking me that? I’m supposed to be working on kindness and respectfulness and you’re asking me if I’m a Christian? Why are we going to that subject? He didn’t get it.

I said to him, “Does God speak to you?”
He says, “No.” That’s what he said. He said no. Which is what most kids say there. No.

I said, “Would you like Him to speak to you?”
He says, “Yes.”
I said, “Okay. Here’s what I want you to do.” I gave him my iPad. I said, “Open my Bible to Philippians 2:3-4 and read it.” He read it.

Here’s what it says. Now remember, kindness, respectfulness – that’s his problem. He reads these verses. *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

I said, “What is that saying to you?” He read the verses again to me. He’s not getting it. I said here, “Give me the Bible. I’m going to show you. God’s going to speak to me right now. Watch this happen. Okay?”

I read those same verses and I said, “Now the part there where it says each of you should *look to the interest of others* – my wife has an important event going on this weekend and this is reminding me that I need to be thinking about my wife’s interest and not be so focused on my own interests. I need to consider her interests in this. And this other part that says *in humility value others above yourselves* – you sitting next to me that I’m talking to, you’re more important than I am, you’re more valuable than I am, and I need to be reminded of that. You’re like a king’s kid and I’m just the person giving you advice. So God has just spoken to me and helped me understand that.”

“Here you try.” I gave him back the Bible again.

He reads the verse and I said, “So what are they saying?”

He says, “Well I think what I need to do is I need to share my video game with my brother.”

“Did you hear it?!” I said.

He’s going, “What? What? What?”

“God just spoke,” I said.

“Now there’s a very important question. You said you wanted to hear God speak, but the second question you have to ask is this: If God speaks, will you listen?”

See, if this young man would listen to the Lord as God is speaking in his heart, he would become more kind, he would become more respectful to his mom because God would do that work inside of him and his heart would prompt him and God would speak to him in that powerful way.

Look at the last verse that I want to show you today in this passage, in Joshua 24:24. Notice the people’s response. *And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the Lord our God and obey him.”*

You see that? We’re not just content to listen to Him speak; we are going to do what He says. Do you want to hear God speak today? Yes, yes, yes. That’s the right answer. Good. Yes, I want to hear God speak. The question that you really want to ask then is if He speaks then will you listen? That’s a very important question.

Let me say this to you. Maybe you’re here today and you don’t even have Christianity 101. You don’t even know what we’re talking about here. This is great because today you can get Christianity 101. That is just knowing several things about God and what He’s done for you and then embracing that for yourself.

Here’s what it means. That you recognize, number one, that you’re a sinner, that there’s sin that’s separating you from God so you can’t have a personal relationship with God unless you deal with a sin problem.

You can't deal with it yourself, that's why you need a Savior. So He's going to come in and He's going to save you from that sin problem. He did that by dying on a cross, rising from the dead, and that's why we celebrate Easter. That's the whole purpose of this day. It's not about Easter bunnies and eggs. It's about Jesus Christ dying on the cross and then rising again for us. He's the Savior.

Okay, now we've got some information. Sin, we've got the Savior, and you need to take that on and say, "I want Jesus Christ to be my personal Savior. Not the Savior for all the world, but the Savior for me. I want Him to come into my heart, I want to give Him my life, I want Him to run my life." And then right away you can upgrade to the server version and serve Him all of your life and watch what He does.

It's just powerful. It's amazing to watch God work. God speaks today. God wants to empower us, wants to give us so much. He wants to bless us. Our responsibility is to listen to what He has to say and obey Him.

In a moment we're going to sing a song. We're going to sing a song that's focused on the cross of Christ. It's an opportunity for you to think about your own relationship with God. Where are you in your relationship with God? What is God calling you to? What is He asking you of? It's a time for you to listen to God speak and He speaks when we sing. If you'll listen to Him and focus on what He's doing, He will speak to you. And when He speaks to you, the very important question you want to ask is are you willing to listen. Because if you're willing to listen and God is speaking, awesome things start happening in your life.

I invite you to consider that today. As we sing we have prayer counselors that are on the sides to pray with you. So you might go up to a prayer counselor and say, "You know, I want Jesus Christ in my life. I want to give myself to Christ." Or "I want to serve God more in my heart." And when you do, those prayer counselors will pray with you and encourage you in the midst of that. Okay?

Let's pray. I'm going to pray and then we'll sing together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I just thank you for the power that you have in our lives. I thank you that you've enabled me to serve you. I just enjoy that so much. Thanks for what you've done in my own life. I pray for those here, that you would be working in each one of their hearts. Lord, you know what they need. I don't know exactly what they need, but you do. As you speak I pray that you would find a responsive heart ready to listen and obey. In Jesus' name, amen.