

TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

Half Acre, Horton Heath, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JS
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Sunday Scriptures: 22nd August 2021

Scriptures: NRSV

Joshua 24:14-15, 19-21 *God speaks through Joshua concerning religious fidelity*

¹⁴“Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region 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.”

¹⁹But Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve the Lord for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. ²⁰If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign god’s, then He will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.” ²¹and the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the Lord!”

Reflection:

God is facing His people with a straight forward choice! Joshua begins with an assertion to get rid of all false gods and worldly idols. Then they are to revere and serve the Lord with sincerity and faithfulness. God disciplines the ones He loves in order to keep them safe and held within His presence. Joshua now reminds the people of when God was present with them by looking back over past years from where they had started and what God had done for them, physically and spiritually to present day. Many were their trials and tribulations over that period of time and generous was God’s love, goodness and provision throughout. Sometimes it is not until we look back at where we have been that we realize how far we have come, how much we have achieved, and appreciate the blessings we have received. Reviewing past trials and blessings can encourage us in both self-discipline and faithful service to God. When failures discourage and difficulties overwhelm we would do well to remind ourselves of the past triumphs, guidance and blessings of God’s grace and love. Instead of allowing our troubles to dictate and the noise of worldly principles to prescribe, we might do better by turning to Scripture and reminding ourselves of God’s unchanging providence and love for His people.

How often do we look back and thank God for all that He has given and done for us? When was the last time we just sat at the feet of the Lord and opened our heart to Him? Is our first response to trials and difficulties to reach for the Word of God or something else?

Joshua had the unenviable task of facing God’s people with the stark reality of their sinful behaviour. They had returned to their old ways of worshipping false gods and following false guides. Joshua, being God’s chosen leader, was tasked with delivering Truth to His people. Joshua outlined their transgressions and presented them with a choice; to decide whether they would obey the Lord, who had proven His trustworthiness, or turn to popular idols and impotent gods made by human hands. False gods and idolatry can subtly lead us into the quiet rebellion of doing our own thing and going our own way. But the time comes when we have to choose who or what dictates the path we take. The only choice that brings deliverance is God; the only spirit that has any power is the Spirit of God; the only Lord that can give us salvation is Jesus. This is a choice we need to affirm every single morning we wake up.

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What will our choices be? Will we commit ourselves to obey God, or give in to our own selfish desires? Will we follow the example of Jesus Christ our Saviour or be side-tracked into the subtle persuasions of worldly attractions?

Joshua displayed his spiritual leadership by standing firm in his faith, regardless of what others decided. This reminds me of the quote of Augustine of Hippo: “Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it.” Joshua knew what was right by God and made a stand for the Lord in Truth and faithfulness to his commitment of faith. In this way he set an example to others of how to make and live by godly decisions. The way we live demonstrates the strength of our faith and commitment to serving God for all to see. As a result of Joshua’s stand, the people of the nation boldly claimed that they would follow the One true God and never forsake the Lord. It is very sad that after such a resolute proclamation of faithfulness God’s people did not keep their promise! Not much time would pass before God would charge them with breaking their contract with Him, yet again ([Judges 2:3](#)). However, through Joshua’s godliness and spiritual leadership, the nation’s conscience was regularly pricked and throughout his lifetime they were brought to repentance and repeatedly returned to God. *Do we take the time to discern what is right and wrong by God? Are we committed enough to make a stand for the Lord in Truth and faithfulness? What example might we be demonstrating to those around us?*

The time to choose who will control us is always right now! We have an awesome God who loves and provides for us, if we will but allow Him. We have a sacrificial Saviour who gave His life that we might be forgiven and saved. We have the most powerful ally in the Holy Spirit that surpasses any authority, wisdom or strength the world could ever produce. *What more could we want, imagine, or ever ask for?* The Word of God is Truth and Truth cannot be debated, bargained with, or changed. We meddle with Scripture at our own peril and there will always be consequences to our choices, for good or for ill, to us and to others. The choice is yours to make, but as for me, I choose to obey God and follow the example of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, so help me God. **Amen!**

Hymn/Song: Will You Come and Follow Me by John Bell & Graham Maule [SF 1120](#)

Will you come and follow Me, if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?
Will you let My love be shown, will you let My name be known,
Will you let My life be grown in you and you in Me?

Will you leave your self behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare,
Will you let Me answer prayer in you and you in Me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean in you and you in Me?

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Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around
Through My sight and touch and sound in you and you in Me?

Lord, Your summons echoes true when You but call my name.
Let me turn and follow You and never be the same.
In Your company I'll go where Your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in You and You in Me.

Poem: FOLLOWERS ©Janice Morgan 2021-March

What must we do to follow the Lord?
Listen to all that He says
For His Word is a sharp two-edged sword.

What must I do the Lord to follow?
Deny all my selfish desires
Evil treats my heart tempts me to swallow

To follow the Lord what must I do?
Give my life in the service of God
Else my life should be lost and yours too

The Lord to follow, I must do what?
Look not to myself but to others
Worldly gain will not profit my lot

Follow the Lord? Yes we must!
We must speak what He taught
Not in shame of His name but in trust

To become the Lord's followers
Not self-absorbed wallowers'
We must bear our own cross with its burrs

The followers of Christ will stand out
And proclaim what they know to be right
They speak with strong words but don't shout

Prayer: Father God, help us to identify and reject all false god's and impotent idols; may we turn to You in times of trial and difficulty and no other; Lord Jesus Christ, help us to gain true reverence for You as our Lord and Saviour; May we serve You in sincerity and faithfulness all the days of our life; Awesome Holy Spirit, empower us with faith that overcomes, trust and faces the foe without fear; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us with the wisdom to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God ([Micah 6:8](#)). **Amen!**