

How do you make decisions? Say you are thinking of buying a car? How do you do it? I'm sure many will head straight to the comparison websites and compare different makes and models and so on.

You will weigh up the pros and cons of this car and that. You will look at reviews by experts.

What about if you are deciding on a school for your child. Today there are so many options and again you may do some comparison tests and weigh up the pros and cons of this school and that.

But with all these in the end you may make a decision but still at the back of the mind there may be a bit of uncertainty. Have I got it right? Is this the best?

But then imagine you are in a relationship how do you decide whether to get married. Do you make comparison tests? Is he or she better than that other person or perhaps even that this person. Do you weight up the pros and cons, the tax advantages of being married, the fact you don't have to pay single supplement when you go on holiday, what he or she might be able to help with round the house? I suggest that these things do not come into it, at least I would hope they don't. No if you are in love then the decision is clear it is a no brainer. You love him and her not anyone else and you want to show that love in the commitment of marriage. There isn't a choice to be made is there?

At the heart of the final chapter in Joshua is a choice, Joshua said to the people "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (24:15). However, for Joshua the choice was clear, it was a no brainer and he continued "as for me and my household we will serve the Lord."

The book of Joshua, as we have seen is about God fulfilling his promise to bring his people under his rule into his land. In Chap 1 that had still to happen by the end of the book it has happened and so, as we saw last week "You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed" (23:14). God had proved faithful and it is that which is at the heart of what we see today and at the heart of the decision God called on his people to make through Joshua.

1. the amazing grace of God v1-13

Having spoken to the leaders of the nation, as we saw last week from Chap 23, Joshua now, v1, got the whole nation together at Shechem. It was a place of history and meaning for God's people, not least in that this was the first place in the land that God had appeared to Abraham and gave him the promise of the land to which Abraham responded by building an altar (Gen 12:6&7).

Having gathered the people Joshua spoke God's word to them.

What we see in these verses is their spiritual history and not surprisingly the emphasis is on God!

Just look with me at it and see where God's people have come from.

V3 "I took Abraham from the land beyond the river." We see God's initiative in bring Abraham out of a pagan environment to be the father of God's people. God did it not because Abraham was good but because God in grace acted.

V6 "I brought your fathers out of Egypt" God's great act of the salvation of his people.

V7 "You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians." God's people were helpless caught between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army and God rescued them.

V9 "I destroyed them (the Amorites) from before you."

V11 "I gave them (the people in Canaan) into your hands".

V13 "So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build."

In God's grace he had called them, made them his people, saved them and given them all the land that they lived in and all that they needed. Their spiritual history was one shot through with the grace of God.

So what about us? What is your spiritual history? What has God done for you?

Just last Sunday at our 10.30 service Brenda Meaney was giving testimony to what God has done for her. She used the words of the hymn Amazing grace, "I once was lost" and then "but now I am found" to describe her path to faith.

If we are here today as followers of Jesus Christ then for us too our spiritual history is shot through with the amazing grace of God. In grace when we, through our rejection of God, were God's enemies God acted in grace to call us out of that pagan land and bring us to himself. When we were helpless unable to remove the sin which cut us off from God he rescued us through the death of his son Jesus. Through grace God has given us eternal life and the assurance of a place in heaven.

God in grace has called us, saved us and given us life. While our personal paths to faith may be different the grace of God is at the heart of it for each of us and if you are still to come to faith then let me again encourage you to reflect on all that God has done.

But Joshua's point is not to leave the people reflecting on their spiritual history but to call them to a full and proper response to all that God has done for them.

2. Choose to serve the Lord v14-15

Joshua's message was clear. See what God has done, "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness" (v14).

The only true response to what God in grace has done for them or for us is to fear him that is to humbly submit to God recognising he is God and to offer him our lives in grateful service.

This was what Joshua called the people of God to do and this is what God calls us to do today.

Joshua puts in there a choice but actually if you look at it, it is really no choice.

In v15 he says if serving God seems undesirable then choose which non gods you are going to serve, it might be those from way back in Babylon or those of the Amorites. The point is clear that there is no choice to be made. He is not offering a Which magazine guide to different gods. In grace God had brought them to where they were and the only response was marriage, that is to commit themselves in love to God.

Let me bring this same message to us today. If you are here or listening to this on download then again let me ask you how have you got here? What has been your spiritual journey to faith? It will be different for all of us but for all of us at the centre is the amazing grace of God. In the light of that I call all of us listening to wholehearted commitment to God in response. To choose to serve the Lord. Yes I know that many of us have done that again in different ways but somewhere along the line we have recognised and stated that we are followers of Christ.

Joshua called the people to make a solemn and binding choice and I encourage us to do the same today. Remember these were God's people not outsiders but, as we shall see in a moment, they faced the siren call of many other gods and Joshua's call to them and through Jesus to us is in the light of God's mercy fear and serve God. "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve". It was for Joshua and the people a day of decision and so it is for us. God is reminding us today of his great love and mercy and calling on us to respond in love and faithful service. In many ways it was a renewal of their vows and covenant to God. Will you do that today? Will you today again say yes I choose to serve the living and merciful God? Today I again covenant to follow Jesus.

3. The cost of discipleship v14-24

Joshua called the people to choose and their immediate response v18 was to say "we too will serve the Lord". It looks good but Joshua had come through the wilderness time under Moses and he knew just how fickle people could be. He was a realist hence his clear statement in v19 "you can't do it". Why did he think that?

Firstly he knew God. Our God he said to them, v19, is holy and jealous. That is he will have nothing to do with sin and with sinful people. He is jealous and wanted to be God and God alone in their lives. Joshua knew how hard that was and the message throughout these verses is to get rid of their other gods. We see this in v14, v20, and v23. This is the cost of loving and serving the Lord. Part of the choosing to serve God is seeing the false gods for what they are and rejecting them.

This is our God he is a jealous God. If you today recommit to serve him then it is him and him alone you must serve. You may well echo the words of the people of God in v16 "far be it for us to forsake the Lord and serve other gods".

Then secondly he knew people and just how tempting we find the many gods around us and how easy it is to be drawn away from service of God not completely but to seek to serve God and other gods.

Nick Page in his book 'The dark night of the shed' has some interesting things to say about the worship of false gods in our modern culture. He notes that what you worship defines your life and that a nations gods are indicated by their biggest buildings, which he suggests are no longer churches but office blocks, banks and luxury high-rise apartments and then says "The skyline of London is a tribute to the gods of the city: money status, luxury and power".

We know in our own lives how easily we can create a god by putting something or someone on a pedestal, give it our time, our energy and in return expect miracles out of it.

Nick lists a number of these gods which tempt us such as Lycra the god of youth, dosh the god of wealth and possessions, exhaustus the god of work and kudos the god of status.

Friends we know the things in life which consume our time and energy and through that become our gods. If we are looking for satisfaction, hope, peace or rescue anywhere else other than in God we are looking in the wrong place. These other gods will fail us and what is more they don't care.

There is a cost to following Jesus and part of that cost is that we put God first in everything. We serve him and him alone. Yes in his grace he blesses our work, he gives us good gifts in terms of family and possessions but he and not they are God. As Jesus put it "no one can serve two masters...you cannot serve both God and money" (Matt 6:24)

Our God is a jealous God and he longs for us to serve and worship him and him alone. What are the gods that we need to throw away that we may serve God with all faithfulness?

Just take time to think to run your life past what God is saying here. What are the things which hinder your commitment to Jesus? What are the things which claim your heart and time? Then when God says "fear and serve me with all faithfulness" what are you going to say. There is no room for compromise – God is a jealous God he will not share our heart and our lives with other things. "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve".

The cost of our salvation was great are we in return prepared to offer our whole hearts and lives back to God and to God alone? Are you prepared for that?

If so how are you going to do it? How are you going to practically allow God to be God over every part of your life?

There is a sense in which every day is a decision day. Every day has the question for whom will I live today? A couple of weeks ago those of us doing Discipleship explored were looking at Phil 3 and we looked in v10 where the opening words are "I want to know Christ" and we agreed that was a pretty good strap line for the Christian. Each morning when we wake up the words in our head "I want to

know Christ". When we are at work "I want to know Christ". When we are socialising with our friends "I want to know Christ".

Joshua stood before the people of God and recounted God's acts of salvation and then in the light of those he challenged them, to make that choice to serve God and only God with fear and faithfulness. The people's response in v24 "we will serve the Lord our God and obey him" and on that day Joshua made an official covenant between the people and God.

Today we are reminded of God's great act of salvation for us in Jesus Christ. In response God calls us to choose to serve him and only him faithfully. Will you do that? Will you here and now renew your commitment to faithfully serve the holy God? Will you covenant to serve and obey God?

We are going to take a time now to reflect.

I'm going to play a song and with it show a few pictures. Use the time to reflect upon your spiritual journey, how you have got to this place and then to renew your commitment to fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness.