

All Saints Talk for Sunday 30th July 2023

'Choose to serve the Lord' Pippa Page

The last talk in our series 'Journey to the Promised Land'

Readings: *Joshua 24:1-15, 25,26. Luke 22:14-20*

The covenant renewed.

Joshua had led the people of Israel into the promised land. By the time we get to chapter 24, they, or rather God, had defeated the people of Jericho, the Amorites, the Perasites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Gershonites, the Jebusites. And the Israelites were now living in their towns and enjoying their crops. Joshua reminded the people of all that God had done for them; how he called Abraham out of Urr of the Caldies, all those years ago, how he had promised him descendants, as many as the stars in the sky, or the grains of sand on the seashore. And then there was Isaac, eventually, and then his sons, Jacob, and Esau. And when there was a huge famine in Palestine and the surrounding area, God provided Jacob and his family the opportunity to move down to Egypt to find food. While Jacob's son Joseph was still alive, life was good for the Israelites in Egypt. But after he died, it got more difficult. And the Israelites were enslaved by the Egyptians and treated very badly. They cried out to God, and He sent Moses to rescue them. Moses, by the way, was the great grandson of Levi, son of Jacob. Moses and his brother Aaron spoke to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt on behalf of God and the Israelites. And after much high drama, he led the Israelites out of Egypt towards the Promised Land, avoiding the Egyptian border posts and the main trade routes. So they ended up going through the Red Sea, which God dried up for them, but not for the pursuing Egyptians. And then they went via the wilderness. God then made a covenant with the Israelites to protect them, and to bring them into the Promised Land, if they would be faithful to Him, serve him wholeheartedly and be a holy people set apart for Him. God provided food and water for them on their journey through various miracles. And their clothes and their shoes, were told, didn't wear out all the way to the promised land. But when they got there, having sent some spies to take a look, they got cold feet, and decided it was too scary to go in. So God said that none of that generation would ever go into the Promised Land except Joshua and Caleb, who were on his side.

So for a further 40 years, they wandered around in the wilderness, looked after, and provided for by God, until the last of those people had died out. Then he brought them into the Promised Land. And as we just heard, defeated all the people who were already there to make space for them. I've missed out loads of really exciting stories about how God did amazing miracles, to protect the nation of Israel. It's all there in the early books of the Old Testament. And also in these books are all the laws and rules and regulations God gave them so that they would know how to live a holy life and please him. So here we are in Joshua 24. Joshua has reminded them of all the things God has done, and is saying, You need to choose? Are you going to serve God wholeheartedly, or are you not? You all need to choose for yourselves, but I and my family have chosen to follow God. And all the Israelite family said, in verse 16, 'Far be it from us to forsake the LORD and follow other gods', which is a bit rich, if you look back at their history: they had been forever forsaking God and doing what they were told not to do. Joshua gave them this warning in verses 19 and 20 of chapter 24. He said, 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. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods he will turn and bring you bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he's been good to you. But they said 'no, we'll serve the Lord.' Joshua's point was, if they were going to serve the Lord, they needed to do it properly and wholeheartedly. They needed to get rid of idols and foreign gods and anything else that got in the way of serving God and being holy. Holy means set apart for God, being different from the people of the surrounding nations. And they said, they all wanted to make that promise to God. So Joshua made the promise to God on behalf of all of them, and set up the pillar to help them to remember what they'd said. But, if we look at Judges, chapter two, Judges comes immediately after Joshua. In verse eight, we read that Joshua died at the age of 110. And then just two verses later in verse 10, It says this. 'After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and served the Baals'. I think this is utterly tragic. The people forgot to teach their children what God had done for them. Is there a lesson here for us to learn? Do we teach our children what God has done for us? I think there's evidence of some very good parenting that we saw this morning actually, bringing children up to know the Lord. But does it go wider than that? And are we all teaching our children and our grandchildren to know the Lord, and to know what he's done?

People were not able to keep the old covenant. They were too distracted by what other nations were doing, which looked more fun. They forgot what God had done for them. They were not sorry for their sins. So God did a new thing. In Hebrews eight, verse eight, which quotes Jeremiah 31, it says this. 'The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah, it will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors.' So, God sent His Son, to be a sacrifice, once and for all, for the sins of everybody who turns to him and believes in him. The New Testament reading we had today, which we usually have in communion services, reminds us that the new covenant is sealed with the blood of Jesus. He died to make a way for us to be acceptable to God, and to be in relationship with Him. John three verse 16 says, 'God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.' So, how do we tap into this new covenant? Well, in John three, verse three, Jesus said, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' That's a bit of an old concept, isn't it? How can anybody be born again? But what it means is that it means we have to have a new beginning. Paul says in two Corinthians five, verse 17, 'If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone. The new is here.'

So we all have to make a decision. Are we going to turn to Jesus Christ and say, I believe in you, I want to serve you. I want to make you Lord of my life. Or are we not? You see, we can't just live on our parents faith. We might have been brought up to go to church every week and go to Sunday school and church youth groups and then carried on coming to church all our life, but we still have to make the decision ourselves at some point, and we can't just try to live a good life without him. The Israelites could never be good enough, and neither can we. It may be a gradual realisation, or it may be sudden. But there has to come a time when we make a decision that we're going to follow Him and serve Him and live for him, or not. In Revelation three, verse 20, Jesus says, 'Here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.' So we just have to invite Him in. When we commit ourselves to Jesus, he comes into our lives by His Holy Spirit, to live in us. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will lead us and guide us and remind us of all the things that Jesus said when he was here. And empower us to live as God wants us to live. God wants us to be

wholehearted in serving Him. Jesus said that the most important commandment was and still is, to love the Lord our God, with all our heart, with all our mind with all our soul and with all our strength. Remember, Jesus didn't say that he'd come to abolish the law. He said, he'd come to fulfill it. That's in Matthew five, verse 17.

Hebrews 10, verse 24: Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but encouraging one another.

We do need the support of one another, to live a holy life. So Are we faithful about coming to church, to worship God and to use our gifts to build up the church? Because actually, you know, if we had the body of Christ in Weston, we are somewhat diminished if one of our feet is still in bed, one of our hands has gone shopping and one of our ears is on the golf course. Coming to church, and to home groups are really important times for helping and encouraging each other, to keep going, keep being the people that God wants us to be. Hebrews 12 verse one says, let's throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance. The race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.

So in summary, Joshua called the Israelites to make a decision for themselves about whether they were going to love and serve the Lord or not. That was the old covenant. The New Covenant is quite similar. We are required to make our own decision individually, whether or not we're going to love and serve the Lord. Jesus has made the one perfect sacrifice for sins for all of our sins. So all we have to do is open the door and invite Him in. Now, many of us have done this a long time ago, but if there is anybody here who hasn't yet made this decision and who would like to, please do come forward for prayer afterwards. You can come to the front here or you can grab Tom or Emma or me wherever you can find us. But there will be prime ministry here. But those of us who have made the decision already might feel that we have become a little bit less holy than we would like to be. That we have allowed some things to hinder or entangle us. Because we all still make mistakes, and need to come back to God every day for forgiveness and to ask for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit. So, let's all stand to pray and to ask the Holy Spirit to come a fresh on us and to show us where we need to ask for forgiveness. Shall we stand together

Almighty God as we come into Your presence and stand here before you, we know that we're not worthy to be called your children. But we just thank you so much for the gift of Jesus, Jesus's sacrifice for us, to make our way back to you to make a way for us to be forgiven and be acceptable. Thank you so much for that gift. And Lord, we just pray that you will fill us a fresh with your spirit this morning. Show us where we're going wrong. Lord, fill us with your joy, your wisdom, your peace, your energy. And Lord make us into the people you want us to be. Because we ask this in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.