



THE STORY OF *Everything* LUKE 24:27

One of the most moving moments I've had in ministry was a time of prayer with a couple. They had been married for almost 10 years when things seemed to be unravelling. The wife had stopped attending church and wasn't returning calls. The husband was growing increasingly angry.

And then the news broke – she had been unfaithful. The marriage had been difficult for quite some time, but now it looked like nothing could save it – except a miracle.

And a miracle took place. Through months of hard work and honest confession, this couple was able to come back together. To celebrate her repentance, our church threw a party and we celebrated this couple's promise to commit to one another afresh. While I didn't know what to call it, we were practicing the renewal of the covenant.

Joshua 24 is about renewing the covenant. A covenant is a promise that binds two people or groups together. Throughout the Bible, there are many covenants that build on one another, and so far we have seen various covenants from God's work in creation, with Noah, Abraham, and with Israel in giving the 10 commandments.

Each one of those covenants gave us details about God's commitment to his people: he made them to have a relationship with him, he would never destroy the earth but would remake it, he would make Abraham a great nation and give him a land, and he would make Israel his treasured possession. And each of these covenants gave details about humanity's commitment: they would be blessed if they followed the commandments, they should protect human life, they must trust God, and they must not live like the nations around them.

For the first time, Israel was facing prosperity. As Israel had come into the land that God promised Abraham and had begun to settle it, Joshua was concerned that wealth would tempt the people away from worshipping God. So he told the people to fear God and serve him with all faithfulness (24:14), and we learn what it means:

Remember God's Faithfulness (Josh. 24:1)

Joshua called all the tribes together at Shechem. This town was a very important place. Over 500 years earlier, Abraham had come here when he first entered the land God promised to him, and that promise in Gen. 12:6-7 was that this land would be given to him. It sat between two mountains: Ebal and Gerezim, the mountains where the Levites had recited from Deuteronomy all of the blessings and curses of the covenant to one another.

Now Abraham's descendants – a couple million of them – were being called back here. The trees where God first appeared to Abraham were still there. The blessings and curses of the

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covenant had been told here. Now Joshua began to remind the people of God's faithfulness (vv. 2-3, 5, 8). God had brought Abraham here, brought Israel out of slavery, and gave them this land – a land that already had cities and produce.

In the face of prosperity and comfort, Joshua reminded the people that they were enjoying all that they had because of God's faithfulness. He did not want them to forget how God had been faithful to them through the hard times of the wilderness, through the battles to settle the land, and now they were enjoying God's faithfulness to them.

Chose Whom You Will Serve (Josh. 24:15)

If God was faithful, Joshua wanted to make it clear that the people should also be faithful (READ v. 15). So Joshua made it clear – everyone worships. It may not be a statue or an idol; it may be an ideology or a feeling. Everyone has a story they believe about how they can be loved and accepted, finding comfort and security, and they follow that story. It may be money, acceptance, feeling loved – but everyone has a story they follow.

The struggle that Joshua confronted in Israel is still the struggle that goes on today. Whom will you serve? Maybe you don't care. Maybe you think it doesn't matter. But we all serve someone. Either we will serve ourselves and live selfish lives and find that we can never be happy and self-fulfilled or we will serve the Lord and find that the self-giving life is the life of blessing and joy.

As for Joshua, he had looked at the alternatives. The gods of the nations left their people needy, desperate, full of violence and hatred. The choice was clear – he would serve the Lord. He would not let the foreign gods shape him. He would make sure his family did not marry unbelievers. He would be focused on serving the Lord.

Throw Away Your Idols (Josh. 24:14-28)

When the people heard Joshua's call to serve the Lord, they responded with a big "Amen!" (vv. 16-18). But Joshua didn't want lip service. He wanted action. So he told them, "You won't serve the Lord!" (v. 19). The people were offended (v. 21), so Joshua told them that if they were going to follow through they would have to do some house cleaning – throwing away the foreign gods among them (v. 23). After all they had been through, seeing all of God's provisions and care for them, seeing his glory in the cloud and his presence with them in the tabernacle, the people had failed to get rid of the nations among them. Instead of getting the nations and their gods out of the land, the gods and the nations were getting into the Israelites. God had told the people to devote all of the foreign ways and gods to destruction (as we saw a few weeks ago in

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Joshua 6), but instead, the people had held on to some of the finer pieces of art and culture from their neighbours and had made it part of their home worship collection.

But God had said that the people must have no other gods except him, and that they should not make nor worship any image (Exod. 20:2-6). Because God is THE God and THE Lord, his call to trust him is also a call to allegiance to him. If he were to come into your home, would he find something offensive there? If he were to pick up your smart phone and scroll through the apps, would he find allegiance to him or allegiance to other gods? What if he went through your social media profiles and online presence?

In spite of Israel's disobedience, God had been incredibly patient with his people. God overlooks inconsistencies in our lives for a while. But there comes a point when He puts his finger on a particular issue, and when he does, it is important to deal with it.

When Joshua said that God would not forgive the people's rebellion and sins (v. 19), he was not saying that they had committed the unforgiveable sin. Father, he was telling them that God would not forgive a sin they would not forsake. You can't say, "I'm sorry!" and still continue to practice the worship of other gods and expect God to be okay with your rebellion.

If the people were to throw away their idols, they would need more than willpower. They would need accountability. They would be witnesses to one another whether or not they would follow the Lord (v. 22). Like a wedding ceremony, when a couple gets married, there are those who come and watch the vows. There are those who sign the legal documents. They act as witnesses to the covenant. If things start to go awry with the couple, those friends are there to say, "Hey – what's going on? Do you remember the commitment you made? Do you remember how you said that in good times and bad, in sickness and health, in times of hardship and times of prosperity, you'd stay and work things out? I'm here for you – let me help you work this through."

Joshua told the people that this is what the people were to do for one another – to continue to follow the Lord.

See the Glory of Christ

And all of this points to the glory of Christ. As Joshua made that covenant at Shechem by the trees there, the place where God had appeared to Abraham. But at another tree, God made a covenant with us. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to give his life for us. If Joshua could point the people back to God's faithfulness at the trees of Shechem, then how much more should we look back to the tree on the Hill of the Skull and see the faithful, steadfast love of the Lord?

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Each time we partake of communion, we are practicing covenant renewal. We are saying again, “Lord, I see your faithfulness. I will choose to follow you. I will get rid of my idols.” Each time at communion, we take a moment to make sure that we are coming as people who aren’t harbouring bitterness and cherishing sin. Instead, we come and we take the bread and the cup and say, “You have been faithful to me. I rededicate myself to you.” Communion is more than remembering; it is renewing our covenant to the Lord, saying again, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”