**Family Service Talk 18th July 2021**

**Joshua 24:14-28**

*14 ‘Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the River Euphrates and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. 15 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.’*

*16 Then the people answered, ‘Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! 17 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. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we travelled. 18 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.’*

*19 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. 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.’*

*21 But the people said to Joshua, ‘No! We will serve the Lord.’*

*22 Then Joshua said, ‘You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord.’*

*‘Yes, we are witnesses,’ they replied.*

*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.’*

*24 And the people said to Joshua, ‘We will serve the Lord our God and obey him.’*

*25 On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. 26 And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord.*

*27 ‘See!’ he said to all the people. ‘This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.’*

*28 Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance.*

Today is the final talk in the series on people making decisions in the Bible. We have looked at several great characters and each one has taught us something about how to make good, Godly decisions.

In today’s reading we are also given ways to help us keep to the decisions we have made. But before we look at those helpful tips, let us look at the background to the passage – who is speaking to who and why!

The name of the book the reading is from gives us a clue. It is the book of Joshua and indeed it is Joshua who is speaking in the reading. Joshua was chosen by God to be Moses’ right-hand man when the Israelites were wandering in the desert from 40 years. When the time was right to finally enter the land that God had promised to lead them to, Moses was not allowed to enter (he had not trusted God fully at Meribah) and so Joshua took over as leader of the Israelite nation, leading them through the River Jordan and into the Promised Land.

Early in the book of Joshua we read how God told Joshua what he had to do in the land and, most importantly, that he, God, would always be with him. And as you read on in the book, there are vivid descriptions of cities being taken over by the Israelites and people being driven out all as part of God’s plan to settle his people in this land. Constantly, Joshua referred to God in order to know his will and, over time, all the tribes were given their allotted land and the nation not only settled but prospered there in fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham more than 500 years earlier.

In chapter 23 we read that Joshua is now ‘old and well advanced in years’ (v1) and wanted to speak to the people of Israel for one final time. So, he summoned them all to a place called Shechem where he shared 3 things with them ….

…. He reminded the people of all that God had done for them. The list was huge and made clear to the people how awesome God was and how much he cared for his people. Joshua started with Abraham and his family, went on to Moses and how God rescued him and the Israelites from Egypt and finally told how God drove out those who were living in the promised land so that Israel could settle there.

…. Having reminded them of God’s power and care he gave them important pointers as to the best way to live as God’s people in God’s land and according to God’s will. I.e. ~ be careful to obey God’s word (23:6) ~ do not serve other gods (23:7) ~ hold fast to God (23:8) ~ be very careful to love God (23:11) ~ fear the Lord and serve him with faithfulness (24:14)

…. Finally, he called them to choose whether to serve and obey God or throw in their lot with the gods of the people who lived around them. They had to make this choice; they could not just sit in the fence.

And as we heard, all the people said that, of course they would serve God after all he had done for them.

But Joshua then ….

~ says that they must mean this as there will be serious consequences if they turn away from God ~ says that they are witnesses to the decisions they have each made ~ draws up a covenant with decrees and laws so that they know what they have agreed to ~ sets up a stone as a reminder of the agreement that have made

He gave them every possible help in making the decision and, most importantly, making sure that they stick to it.

We too, each one of us, must make a decision as to who we will serve in our lives – who will we put in the number 1 spot? Will it be God…… or will it be … our work … our family … football … gardening … motor racing … television … ourselves … or even the church. None of those other things in the list are bad in any way and are an important, God given and indeed joyful part of our lives. But the decision Joshua was talking about was …. who is the MOST important aspect of our lives, in other words, who will we live to serve and worship and who will guide us in all the other areas? When we come to make that decision, (or even remind ourselves of the decision we made long age) we too can do as Joshua suggested to the Israelites.

…. We can look at all that God has done in our lives, i.e., … ~ love us so much he died on the cross for us ~ call us to believe in him so that we can be with him now and for ever ~ seek to bless us and guide us in all truth

…. We can look at how God guides us to live his way, i.e., … ~ read the Bible ~ obey his word ~ hold fast to him and turn away from other gods ~ love, fear and faithfully serve God

Having done all this, we can then make the decision that the Israelites made – ‘we too **will** serve the Lord, because he is our God’ (24:18)

And it may be that we too have people who hold us to account if we seem to be wobbling in our faith and service of God. We may have things that remind us of our promises to follow God made in Baptism and Confirmation. All really helpful in keeping to that decision to love and serve the Lord. Amen