

“The Personal Commitment”—Joshua 24:16-18

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Personal Commitment”, is Joshua 24:16-18 → *The people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, for it is the LORD our God Who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and Who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.”*

This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

The words of Joshua in his “farewell address” to God’s people are probably some of the most familiar words in the mind of many Christians. “As for me and my house . . .” (Allow the people to finish the phrase. “. . . we will serve the LORD”) Why are these words so familiar? Could it be that they grace the walls of many of the homes you’ve visited? Those words adorning homes are a very important confession of faith! They may also express a desire and prayer for the people in that household to live in service to the LORD. I believe

they also serve as a reminder to those living there to act “appropriately” in connection with how they talk to one another, respect one another, what kind of principles and morals govern their lives and the priority which the LORD has in every area of their lives. Yet, as life in the household “fleshes” itself out, sin can be visible at every turn. Indeed, they are challenging words to follow.

Listen to a quote: “Alas, what a variety of misery I saw! The common people, especially in the villages, know nothing at all of Christian doctrine, and many pastors are quite unfit and unable to teach. Yet all are called Christians, have been baptized, and enjoy the use of the Sacraments, although they know neither the Lord’s Prayer nor the Creed nor the Ten Commandments and live like the poor beasts and senseless pigs . . . Conditions in the congregations everywhere are pitiable. The peasants learn nothing, know nothing, never pray, do nothing but abuse their liberty, do not confess their sins, do not receive the Lord’s Supper—almost as if they had been completely freed from religion.” (Quote of Martin Luther from his preface to the Small Catechism.

Translation taken from “Luther: Biography of a Reformer,” © 2003 CPH, pages 147-148)

Do you know the source of that quote? You will find it in the preface of your Small Catechism. It is a description of the church which Luther encountered as he visited the churches professing to be “Lutheran.” Unfortunately, these words could be applied to many Christians today. People have all kinds of talk

about God; they have all kinds of “religious” plaques on their walls; they even claim to be believers in Jesus. However, many of those same people couldn’t explain the Christian faith if ask to do so or even recite the Apostle’s Creed, which is a confession of that faith!! What would Luther say about us after a visit? More importantly, what would Jesus say?

Joshua’s confession, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD,” came after encouraging God’s people to turn from their idolatry, *fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness*. (cf. Joshua 24:14) It expressed a personal commitment of service to Yahweh as Lord of their lives. Why? Why would Joshua, the Israelites or you make such a personal commitment to serve the LORD?

The prophet Samuel explained why in his “farewell address” in 1 Samuel 12:24 → *Fear the LORD and serve Him faithfully with all your heart. **For consider what great things He has done for you.*** Notice a personal commitment in faithful heart-service to the LORD flows from considering ***what great things He has done for you!*** Committing your life in service to the LORD can only flow from faith which recognizes the LORD’s commitment in love to us sinners! The idolatry of selfishness moves you to grumble and complain about what you think God has not done . . . or rather should be doing in your life? Idolatry produces thanklessness while experiencing God’s on-going

providence in one way or another? You see, your love for the LORD will express itself in true service to Him by your actions first and foremost of avoiding idolatry and considering ***what great things He has done for you!***

Thus, we must come face to face with our idolatry in order to experience the wonderful benefits of Yahweh's commitment to us in Jesus. While you probably don't have little gods or idols set up in your house to which you bow down and worship, they do exist in many homes. Yet, idolatry has many faces in your life. Allowing the way you were brought up by your parents to guide and determine the direction of your life, especially if their ways did not have consideration for the LORD. (cf. Joshua 24:14) Idolatry expresses itself in addictions, relationships, possessions, traditions, a standard of living, patriotism, victimization . . . you name it. All of it flows from daily spiritual battles in your heart brought on by the devil himself!

Notice the choices placed before the people: serving Yahweh or idolatry—serving the LORD or serving satan. There is no neutral ground when it comes to the personal commitment to Jesus! Check out your confirmation vows where you renounced the devil with all his works and all his ways and said you will suffer all, even death, rather than turn away from serving God. Jesus put it this way in Matthew 12:30 → *Whoever is not with Me is against Me*. Even if a person thinks he is neutral in spiritual matters, this deception of

satan is simply another form of idolatry.

On the basis of what God had done for them, the people in our text affirmed a strong conviction about Yahweh as **their** God, along with a commitment to serve **only** Him. *Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods!* (Verse 16) Forsake the LORD of heaven and earth to serve our own whims, desires and wants? **Never!! What confession of faith!!**

Verses 17-18 tells us the basis for such a personal commitment of service to God: *for it is the LORD our God Who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and Who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.*” Notice they referred to Him as *the LORD our God*. Their focus was on what God **had** done for them in His delivering them from their slavery in Egypt, entering into a personal commitment to them as their loving Father and giving them a new home! They actually focused on His grace in Jesus Christ!

The LORD’s saving His people from their slavery in the Exodus event looked forward to His saving us from our slavery to sin and the devil through the Person & Work of Jesus Christ! The people in our text were living in the

midst of the God's gracious blessings in the Promised Land!! The Exodus event is centered in Christ! It was all about the great thing God has done in your life, His greatest act of salvation as Jesus, *the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world* (cf. John 1:29), shed His blood on the cross of Calvary **for you!** You have received the benefits of His grace when He entered into a personal commitment to you as your loving Father in baptism. You experience the great thing He has done for you when He gives you His body and blood in the Lord's Supper and as you encounter Him in the Gospel!

God has provided the reason for us to **want** to serve Him—because of what He has done for us in His grace and His providence! It is a service which can only happen as the Holy Spirit works His good works through us. As Zechariah 4:6 says: *Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.* The LORD has done everything to save us and continually provides for us! As we recognize and trust this action on His part **by faith in Jesus Christ alone** we are moved to give back to Him our lives, our hearts and our service by an unwavering personal commitment to Him!! And this, not just once through a ceremony called Confirmation but every day being *made holy by the word of God and prayer.* (cf. 1 Timothy 4:5) Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen