



Sermon – 09/03/2023
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered

Joshua 24:14 – 18, 31

We get the joy of opening our Bibles together to Joshua chapter 24 this morning. Joshua 24. And if you're a guest today, welcome home. We're so glad that you're here. And you've stepped in at a great time in the life of our church because we're launching a new initiative over the next two years. As we step towards our 100th anniversary and we call it NEXT. And the whole heart behind this is, we're a church where every generation is reaching the next generation. And as we march towards our 100th anniversary in 2025, we want to take next steps so that the next generation can encounter Jesus. And one of the next steps we're going to be taking after our message this morning is the Lord's Supper and I want to remind you how that works here at Central. Uh during the response song, I want to invite you to make your way to the the tables that are all around the worship center and grab those elements and we'll partake of that family meal later on this morning.

Now, you might have noticed right here to my writing left, there are a couple of things under these drapes and I want you to see them. But before I show them to you, let me call your attention up to the screen. Have you ever seen what the first location looked like that Central met in? We met in the Brazos County Courthouse. I think we've got a picture of it from when it was originally built back in the 1890s, 1892. From 1954 that courthouse was in downtown Bryan and our church launched with 81 people in 1925 in that courthouse. And not long ago a donation was made to the courthouse today of two artifacts that were there and present in that courthouse from its origin in 1892. The first one is right here, this newel post. And it sat at the base of the stairs that led to the upper level of this courthouse. And I just can't help but wonder for those, that short period of time that we met in that courthouse, how many of our people would have put their hands right here on this as they began to climb those stairs. Or when you saw that picture, you saw the stone facade that was there. There were stones just like this one that were used to build up that courthouse to make it ready for its purpose. And that courthouse where our church began, it was leveled in 1954. It stood for nearly 60 years. But for the last 70 years, that courthouse has been gone but the church that was birthed in it still remains. And the posts and the pillars that helped it to stand are no longer there. But the foundation and pillars of our church remains. Even those, even though those stones have been stripped away, they're gone, the Bible gives us this picture of the church as a living stones brought together, raised up, and prepared to be a place for God. And so even though that part of our past is no longer there, God is still faithful in leaving a legacy through the life of this

church. And that's what this message this morning is all about. How will you be remembered when you die? That's the question of your legacy. How will you be remembered when you die? The answer to that question is going to come at the intersection of where your short term investment in this world makes a long term spiritual impact. Over the course of these weeks, in our NEXT series, we've been talking about the seven marks of a next generation Christian. The first one last week is, we should be people of prayer. This week is, we should be people of legacy. 5 seconds after you die, you will see clearly what you should have been living your life for all along. And what Joshua 24 is going to help us see this morning is what that legacy should look like. What that short-term investment in the limited time we have now should look like today. So, let's pick up in the passage. We're going to start in Joshua 24 beginning in verse 14. Here's what the text says.

¹⁴“Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

¹⁵And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

¹⁶Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, ¹⁷for 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. ¹⁸And 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.”

When Joshua speaking these words over the nation of Israel, he's over 100 years old. He is near death. He's had taken up the leadership mantle from Moses and God had seen it through. The victories have been won. The land has been conquered. The covenant has been renewed. And now in his final words to the nation, he calls them to a legacy. And this happens at a place called Shechem. I want you to see a picture of this area up on the screen just so you can get a visual of this context that they're in. You see right in the middle, Shechem, it is in the valley between two mountains. And you look at them and what we would find if we went back to Deuteronomy chapter 11, what you would see is that at this place when they were preparing to enter into the promised land God put before the people two mountains. Two pathways. Two ways to live. One, the path towards Mount Ebal that would bring curses when they reject God with their legacy. The other though, to Mount Gerizim, the place of blessing, if they follow God with their legacy. And here they are. They stand in the valley between the two mountains and Joshua is putting in front of them the same question he's confronting us with today. Who will you serve? Which path will you take? What legacy will you leave? And what we're going to find this morning as we work our way through Joshua 24, is that if we want to leave a legacy for Christ, it's going to show up in three key areas of our life and the first one starts in verse 14. The text is calling us to leave a faith legacy. To leave a faith legacy.

So, what I know about this world is that everyone of us is leaving a legacy with our life. The question is, what type of legacy are we leaving? And at the core of that is the question of what are we doing with our hearts? And what are our hearts doing with the invitation to faith in Jesus that God has called us to? You see, here's what happens. Whatever shapes our hearts shapes our choices. And whatever shapes our choices shapes our days. Whatever shapes our days shapes our

years. Whatever shapes our years shapes our life. And whatever shapes our life shapes our legacy. It defines the faith legacy that you and I will leave behind. And what Joshua is showing the people of God in Israel and to you and me today, is that when it comes to our faith legacy, there's two things that we've got to do when it relates to our heart. Our hearts first need to be strengthened by the right things. So, look at the beginning of verse 14. Now therefore fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and faithfulness. You see that word there, serve. If you were to circle it over and over again in these verses, you would see it show up 7 times. And what should that service look like? What are those things that strengthen our heart and our faith journey? Well look back at the text. He speaks of fearing the Lord. He speaks of sincerity and faithfulness. So, fearing the Lord is having this right view of God and His majesty and who He is. Sincerity, living out our faith in a way that is authentic, that we're not just putting on a front to fit in in a Bible-belt culture like here in Bryan/College Station. And faithfulness, the day in, day out, faith is marking who we are as a people of God. We're strengthened by the right things. But also we need to be shielded from the wrong things. That's why in the second half of the verse there, you see him say, put away the gods of your fathers that who they serve beyond the river and in Egypt and instead serve the Lord. He's confronting the idols that were in the hearts and in the homes of his people. He's saying, if you want to live a life that honors God, if you want to leave a legacy of faith through your life, it's not just about what strengthens your heart but what shields your heart from the idols that seek to creep inside. Now, for them, we know it would have been handcrafted objects that they would have put their worship in instead of God. And while our idols today might look different, they are after the same place in our hearts. That pull towards success that's driving you in your studies at A&M or chasing that promotion. That longing for satisfaction that has you moving it into private browsing mode on your screen before you look at things that you shouldn't be seeing. That desire for significance that has you always on a swivel, longing for the approval of others. Those idols take root in our hearts in a way that can disrupt the faith legacy that God is calling us to.

What a rich legacy of faith we've seen in the 100 years of this church. Earlier this week, we had a chance to gather together some of our most long-time members in the church. We had about a dozen of em up here. Just to do some storytelling about God's work in the past. We had people that have been here all the way since the 1940s when our church was still called College Avenue Baptist Church. One of my favorite stories was from one of our amazing widows, Norma Rice. She talked about how she got married in our church. That's not all that unusual to get married in a church. But what was unusual about her particular situation is she got married on Sunday morning right before the worship service. How about that for the pastor? Before you preach the sermon, you got the wedding bells ringing. And they didn't stay for Sunday school. They were headed off to the honeymoon. I don't blame em for that. But some of the most powerful stories weren't through moments like that. They were reflections on people who left a faith legacy through this church that made an impact that's still radiating down today. So, to hear about some of them in the 50s and 60s who are part of our newlywed class here led by Martha Ray Jones and to know that, and Chester Jones, and to know the way that they impacted their marriage in that period of time that carried forward for decades. Or to hear stories about people volunteering in our nursery who claimed as they served for 40 years they had the spiritual gift of changing diapers. That type of legacy has marked our spiritual home for decades. And it's a kind of picture that Joshua is calling the people to here. What are you going to do with the faith that God has given you? What are you going to do with the Jesus that you put your hope in? Are you going to turn away from Him toward the idols of today? Are you going to serve Him with everything you've got for the building up of the body of Christ and the advancement of His kingdom? I mean, I imagine if we

had time, we could go around to every person in this room and you could tell me story after story of someone who's left a legacy in your life. Maybe you knew them for decades or just for a moment but they were a part of shaping you into who you are today. Can you think of that person in your mind right now? The characteristics that were true of them, the way they poured themselves into you. My guess is you could match who they were up with what Joshua calls us to in 24:14. They feared the Lord. They served Him in sincerity. They walked in faithfulness. And perhaps one of the best things you could do coming out of this week's sermon is pick up the phone and call them and tell them about the impact they made on you in your past. And to on what was true of them so that you might pay it forward to the next generation. That's what it looks like to leave the kind of faith legacy that Joshua is picturing here in the text.

But there's a second legacy that we're called to that we'll see in verse 15. Not just a faith legacy, he calls us to leave a family legacy. So look at what it says in verse 15.

¹⁵And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

So, last week, we were in Philippians 4:6 and I told you it's one of the most highlighted Bible verses on the Bible app. My guess is this verse right here maybe one of the most crocheted verses in our homes. I mean, how many of you have this somewhere in your home, verse 15, somewhere there. I think we even have a picture of one of our friends from up here in church. Uh the Maxwell family, they got this as a gift whenever they were married. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the danger is it can become so familiar that it loses its force. We miss the significance of what Joshua is declaring here. Because he's telling us that if we want to leave a legacy with our family, it comes through the answer to two questions. The first question is, who will we serve? Who will we serve? And he shows us three options there in verse 15, if you look back at it. First, he speaks about the gods of your fathers from beyond the river, the gods of the past. These idols of the family, these generational sins. But then he speaks second about the gods of the Amorites who they lived among right there in Canaan. And the Gods of today, the present, the ones in their culture that were driving them away from God and His design for their life. But there's a third option. Not the god the past and the gods of the present but the Lord of the future. He says, choose this day who you will serve. There's an urgency to the moment. This is not something to put off down the line. It's not something you'll get around to later on. He says, if you want to leave a legacy for your family, it starts today. And it's something that you commit to every day; choosing God over the gods of this world.

So, it starts with the answer to the question, who will you serve? But the second question is, how will you serve? And so you see the way he speaks about that there in the end of verse 15. Remember, he's surrounded by a hostile culture. He's speaking to skeptical people. But he puts it all on the line at the end of verse 15 when he says, me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And when we're answering that question, how will we serve? We see three different ways that Joshua shows this to be true in his life. First, this is a personal choice. He talks about me. He doesn't say what should be true of them first. He says, for me, for my life, my heart, my legacy it will center on God. It's a personal choice. But it's also a parenting choice. He says, not just me but my house. We're in. My family, my household, my people are not going to follow the gods of this world. We're going all in with the God of the universe. But then also think about this. It's a public choice.

He didn't keep this to himself. It might have been easier if he had just made that decision on his own but lived the way the rest of the community lived in this hostile culture. Instead, he goes public with this commission, this commitment, this commission. He says, we will serve the Lord. It doesn't matter how hostile the culture is. It doesn't matter how skeptical the people of God around him were. He is making this public declaration that they're going all in with God. I'm curious if you've ever wondered what would happen if a massive asteroid was discovered by NASA to be barreling its way across the universe to Earth. What if we knew decades in advance that we were going to face a direct hit from something that couldn't be stopped. Well, NASA undertook this exercise last year and they decided to launch a test to see if there would be some way to redirect an asteroid that might be a danger to Earth before it was too late. And so what they did, they launched this program called Dart, the double asteroid redirection test. And what they did is they launched this object about the size of a refrigerator. And they long it into space. It traveled 7 million miles at 14,000 miles an hour in order to make a direct impact on an asteroid about the size of the Eiffel Tower. So it launches this out. And this asteroid actually orbits around a larger asteroid as it moves around the universe. And it takes about 11 hours for one asteroid to cycle around the next one. And the hope was that upon impact that they could take that 11-hour orbit and modify it by at least 70 seconds. When the impact finally came and they were able to measure the results, they were stunned and encouraged to find out that not only had it moved to just 70 seconds, it had redirected the orbit, the course of life for this asteroid by over 32 minutes. One impact now changing its trajectory for its future. That's the picture of what Joshua is calling us to here in this text. When he says, choose this day who you will serve. And he's speaking about our family legacy. He's talking about the reality that decisions we make today for our family life can transform its future, transform its direction, transform the legacy that we'll be leaving behind.

And to that end, I just want to speak very directly to the men in this room today. God has called you to be spiritual leaders in your home. That as the man goes so often goes the family. And this text is challenging each one of us to step up, to lead, to choose this day who we will serve, to redirect the orbit of our family life, to put our families on a different trajectory. Just like what Joshua is declaring he's done with his own home then. But it seems to me that this text speaks beyond just the life of our family. Because if you think about it, the entire book of Joshua is laying out this picture of Joshua, the leader of the people of Israel as a forerunner and a foreshadowing to Jesus who is to come. And think about how that's true. I mean, God brings Israel out of Egypt and slavery to sin through the Exodus. They sojourned through the wilderness. And now Joshua takes them across the river. They pass over on dry ground. They conquer their enemies. They inherit the land of promise. And what we find in the Bible is a picture in the New Testament that one day God has raised up a son who in the way of Joshua will do that exact same thing. He will lead His people out from slavery to sin through the Exodus. He will help us sojourn through the wilderness of our hardships and preserve us. He will usher us into a promised land because He had conquered satan, sin, and death for you and me. So that if we don't look to ourselves for our deliverance but instead, look to Jesus, we can find the freedom we've longed for. We can find the hope we're missing. We can find the deliverance that we can't make on our own. So, what significance does that add to this verse right here? Well, if Jesus is a new and better Joshua, then, this promise doesn't just extend to our biological families, it extends to our faith family in the church. I mean, think about it. Ephesians 2:19, Paul describes us as the household of God. And what we find here in this text is a preview of Jesus, the greater Joshua, saying, as for me and my house, as for me and my church, we will serve the Lord. We go where our Savior takes us. We

serve where our Savior calls us. We leave a family legacy for our faith family in exactly the way that this envisions for us.

But there's one other legacy you'll notice here in the text down in verses 16 through 18. They were called to leave a future legacy. We're leaving a future legacy. And I came across a quote from the 1800s evangelist D.L. Moody that I want you to see. I think we've got it on the screen that paints a picture of the future legacy we're called to leave. Moody says,

Our greatest fear should not be a failure but of succeeding at things in life that don't really matter.

Wow. Have you looked at your life lately? Are you succeeding in things that don't really matter? Are you succeeding in things that won't extend the future legacy that God has called you to? If we want to get our future legacy right, the way that we're remembered, what people will recall at our funeral, what will define our life, then what this text is showing us is that we need to do several things in our heart. The first one is to recognize. We need to recognize what's at stake in our future legacy. And that's exactly what Israel did here when they respond to Joshua in verse 16, look at what they say. Then, the people answered, far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods. They realize it. They get it now. They know there's only two ways to live, two paths to take, two legacies to leave. Either, they will forsake God and pursue the idols of this world or they will forsake the idols and pursue the God of heaven. There's no middle ground. There's no neutrality. There's no casual decision to be made here. And that same thing is true today. We don't walk into this church this morning with a casual interest in the things of God. He's after our hearts. He wants everything of us or nothing at all. He wants us to pursue Him. And the way that that happens is by recognizing what's at stake. But that's not the only thing Israel does.

After they recognize what's at stake, you'll see next that they remember the past and they remember what God has done before. And so look at verse 17 when it tells us,

¹⁷for 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. ¹⁸And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land.

So, what did they do? In order to remind them of what they're called to do in their future, they remember what God has done in the past. That's why I love bringing up things like these artifacts. This newel post, this stone. They're visual representations of a remembrance we should have of what God has done in the past. And for Israel, they were looking back on that Exodus, on sustaining them in the wilderness, on bringing them into the promise land. And for us as we enter into this next season and look back on 100 years. We can see things just like this and know the same faithfulness of God. This text is showing us if we want to leave a legacy for our future, we need to remember how God has been leaving a legacy in our past. Maybe another way to say it is, everyone of us is sitting in the seat of someone else's sacrifice. What kind of sacrifice are you going to make today to ready those seats for the next generation? He says, to remember.

But then there's one more piece right after this. It comes at the end of verse 18. After we recognize the stakes and we remember God's work in the past, we need to recommit ourselves to the mission today. So, look at how they do that in verse 18 at the end.

Therefore, we also will serve the Lord for he is our God.

So, seven times the word serve is used in this text and this is the one time that the congregation looks at their leader, Joshua, and makes a public recommitment to serving the Lord. And let's see how that goes. If you just look down towards the end of this chapter in Joshua 24:31, how'd they do? Look at what verse 31 says.

³¹Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel.

In other words, it worked. For the days of Joshua, for the the days that came after him and the next generation of leaders, the people serve the Lord just as they committed. But if we were to keep reading and move our way into the next book of the Bible in Judges chapter two, what we would find is, soon afterwards, this recommitment to serve, it falls apart. It tells us there's no leader in Israel that the people of God did what was right in their own eyes. Even though they persevered in this future legacy for one generation, they lost it in the next. Which reminds us of the reality that we're always one generation away from losing the Gospel. That's why we have a next generation urgency in our church. We want to see families reach. We want to see college students transform. We want to see the next generation seeing the need of Jesus, finding and following Him all of their days because collectively, that's what God is using to write the future legacy of our church. There was a scientist back in the 1800s in Europe. First name was Alfred. And Alfred was such a successful inventor that he had over 300 patents for things that he designed. And probably his best known invention was dynamite. And many of the inventions that he created were used for war or for death. And back in the late 1800s, his brother Ludwig died. And the local paper, the story goes, wrote an obituary upon his brother's death, but they had a case of mistaken identity. And rather than write an obituary for his brother Ludwig, they actually wrote it for Alfred. And in this obituary, they described him as the merchant of death because of all the things that he had created that could facilitate greater killing and warfare. And the story goes that when Alfred read his own obituary before he died, it changed everything for him. That man was, went by the full name Alfred Nobel. Maybe that name rings a bell to you because we know the Nobel Prize. This man who was once known as the merchant of death came face to face with his legacy. Face to face with his obituary and change the direction of his future. From being a merchant of death to being someone who is renowned for celebrating the protection of life for generations to come after him. I can't help but wonder what would be the headline if someone were to write the obituary of our lives today? What would they say about you? How would it read? What would it list as your significance, your impact, your legacy in this world? Would you like what you see? Or would you be just like Alfred Nobel coming face to face with that truth and recognizing that the way you're living your life right now is leading to a future legacy that you don't want to become a reality. See, this passage this morning is bringing us face to face with the question; choose this day, who you will serve. Because who you choose this day to serve is what's going to shape that future legacy for a lifetime.

Yeah, I can't help but notice. Here is Joshua. He's at the end of his life. Faithful to the end. Leaving a legacy all the way up to his last breath. And I want you to experience the story of someone right here in our church who's doing that exact same thing in a different way. Who's leaving a legacy all the way up to her last breath. And so let's turn our attention to the screens and watch this video about our own wonderful church member, Christy Hanson.

My name is Christy Hanson and this is my Central Story. I was born on Christmas day and raised in the small town of Sweeney, Texas. I'm an only child and grew up in a loving Christian home with Godly parents who taught me from a young age that every good gift is from the Lord. My central story began in August of 1993 when I moved to Bryan and started my studies at Texas A&M University. In January of '94, I attended Central Baptist Church. We were meeting in the Bryan Civic Center while the sanctuary was being renovated. During the welcome that first Sunday, two college members, Shane and Stacy, introduce themselves and invited me to Freedom, a college life group. From then on, I was involved in the college ministry and soon after joined the Central Choir. Central became my family where I was loved and encouraged to grow in my relationship with Christ. Discipleship and service were modeled and I was invited to join in. Central felt like home. After graduation, I started my teaching career with a greater purpose in mind. Since the beginning, I've had a reoccurring dream of being in heaven surrounded by a tulip garden. Each colorful tulip represents one of my students that came to know Jesus and I would get to spend eternity with them in heaven. Although I love teaching many useful skills to my kids in first grade and preschool. My ultimate goal was to plant seeds and grow my garden. Each day, I had the opportunity to love with Christ's love and plant seeds of truth. I also trusted the Lord would send others behind me to water and harvest those seeds. But my central story took a turn in 2013 when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Although it was a scary diagnosis, there was an overwhelming peace. My intimacy with the Lord deepened like never before. 2 Corinthians 4:17 became my life verse. For a light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. After four months in surgery, I was in remission. Although I did not share the diagnosis with a large group, those who knew were faithful to pray me through the trial. Then, during an annual checkup in the summer of 2020, I learned the cancer had returned. Because it was more invasive and the trial would last longer than a few months. I would have to share with those I knew. My Central family stepped up and took care of me with prayers, meals, and chores. I even had ladies come wash my hair. The church family loved me and my parents well. In December of 2022, I received another cancer diagnosis. The cancer had spread to my liver and spine. And at a recent doctor's visit, they told me I have a few seasons to live, but not years. I'm excited about everything Central is doing with the NEXT Initiative as we approach our 100th anniversary. But I've come to realize that unless the Lord performs a miracle, I will not be here to celebrate the anniversary with the church I love. With the eternal perspective the Lord has given me, He has made it clear there is a legacy for me to leave for the next 100 years of our church. Even though I won't be here to celebrate the finish of our first century, I have seen its fruits in my life and I want to plant seeds for the next century. So when the Lord takes me home, I want to give back to the church that has given so much to me. For almost 30 years, this church has been the place where I found rest, support, and comfort. Singing praises to the Lord standing next to those who loved me and pointed me to Jesus. My prayer is that whatever I leave would be used to lead the next generation to Christ. Even though I won't be able to gather with our church family to mark the 100th anniversary, I'll have an even better view from heaven rejoicing with the angels and my Savior on that special day. And I trust that when I'm standing in my garden with Jesus,

I'll watch is more tulips spring up in the century ahead. Because of the seeds He allowed me to plant here. Love you.

We love you, Christy. Thank you for your courage and sharing your story and for strengthening us through your testimony. And I just can't help but think about, Christy knows from doctors that she may not be with us two years from now when we celebrate this moment. But what we know is life is a vapor and there maybe more of us even so gathered here today who won't be here on that day. But what I want you to sense from her is that hunger to leave a legacy. And to make an impact. And as we turn our hearts to pray and ready ourselves to respond, my challenge to you, choose to stay who you will serve. Leave a legacy just like He's leaving all the way to the end with Christy. We're so encouraged by you. We're grateful for you.

Let's take a moment to pray together. As you bow your heads with me, I want to remind you that during the response song, we'll have ministers down here at the front that want to pray with you or talk about next steps. I want to encourage you to grab your Lord's Supper elements. In this time.

Father, thank You for the way that we see Your light shining through the life of Christy Hanson. Thank You for the hope she still has even when her body may never see healing. Thank You for the way that You're using her all the way to the end to show people more of Your Son. And Lord, whether she's with us in two years or not, or she's seated in the heavenlies near You in that tulip garden, on that day, Lord, I pray that we don't forget her commitment, but more than that, that through her sacrifice, we see the commitment that You've made for us through Your Son. Lord, I ask for every person in this room who's gathered here, that You would challenge us, call us, to choose today not to serve the things of this world but to serve You, God. And we pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.