



Choosing to Serve with Faithfulness and Holiness

Continuing with our text from Joshua 24 that we featured in the previous weeks, I want you to focus on these two portions of that chapter. Verse 14, and then verses 19-20.

Joshua 24:14, 19-20 New International Version (NIV)

14 “Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.

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.”

Joshua associates serving the Lord with sincerity, and faithfulness in verse 14, and with Holiness in verse 19). The ease that come with blessings can be a subtle enemy of serving God in sincerity and truth. We must be faithful and we must be holy in both times of blessing and times of need.

Let's start with faithfulness.

In Jesus' parable of the talents, the Lord tells of two faithful servants who used what they had been given to increase the master's wealth. When the master returned from a long absence, he rewarded his two faithful servants and said to each of them, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21 NIV). Every Christian longs to hear those words from Jesus' lips someday in heaven.

When a person walks consistently with God, in humble service to Him, he or she can be called "faithful." When Nehemiah had to leave Jerusalem to return to Persia, he put Hanani and Hananiah in charge. The reason for his choice of these men was that they were "more faithful and God-fearing . . . than many" (Nehemiah 7:2, ESV). Nehemiah needed men of character whom he could trust. Men who would not take bribes, who were committed to the welfare of the people, and who would uphold the integrity of the office. Notice, also, that faithfulness is associated with fearing God. The better we truly know God, the more we will want to imitate Him.

Other examples of faithfulness include Silas (1 Peter 5:8), Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21), Epaphras (Colossians 1:7), Onesimus (Colossians 4:9), and Moses (Hebrews 3:2). Some of the names included in this "faithful list" are unfamiliar to most people. Not much is known of Tychicus or Epaphras, for example. But faithfulness, even in small matters, is known to God and rewarded in the end.

Luke 19:17 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

17 And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.'

We must also practice holiness.

Holiness is not only a possibility for the Christian; holiness is a requirement. "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14)

When God told Israel to be holy in Leviticus 11 and 19, He was instructing them to be distinct from the other nations by giving them specific regulations to govern their lives. Israel is God's chosen nation and God has set them apart from all other people groups. They are His special people, and consequently they were given standards that God wanted them to live by so the world would know they belonged to Him. When Peter repeats the Lord's words in 1 Peter 1:16, he is talking specifically to believers. As believers, we need to be "set apart" from the world unto the Lord. We need to be living by God's standards, not the world's. God isn't calling us to be perfect, but to be distinct from the world in a pursuit of His holiness.

Of course, the flesh is weak (Mark 14:38). None of us will reach sinless perfection in this world, but God has made provision for our sin. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Our pursuit of holiness in this world includes daily confessing and forsaking sin.

Hebrews 12:1-2 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

12 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

If God was gracious enough to redeem us from sin and death and give us new life in Christ, the very least we can do is offer our lives back to Him in complete surrender and holiness.

One day, in heaven, we will be free from sin and all its effects. Until then, we "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" and keep running our race.