

“AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”:
A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

CHOOSE THE LORD
(JOSHUA 24:14-15)

I. Introduction

II. Fear the Lord (Joshua 24:14)

- A. The passage begins this way: “Now therefore”—in light of everything that the Lord has done—this is the loving and grateful response that Israel must give: Joshua says, “fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness.”
- B. To fear the Lord is to hold him in the absolute highest regard. It is to revere the Lord and honor him for who he is; namely, the Creator and the rightful Master of heaven and earth and our heavenly Father.
1. The fear of the Lord is an internal disposition, an attitude of the heart.
 2. To fear the Lord is the internal reaction that we have when we realize who God is—the Holy One; the One who holds our lives in his hands.
 3. To fear the Lord is therefore...
 - a. To be afraid of offending him.
 - b. To be in awe of who he is.
 - c. To abase or humble oneself before him, giving preference to his will above all things.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does it mean to fear the Lord? (2) Do you fear the Lord?

III. A Fearful Love and a Loving Fear

- A. How does the fear of the Lord relate to the love of the Lord?
1. We can start from either end of the question.
 2. If we start with the love of the Lord, we could say that the fear of the Lord is a necessary product of loving the Lord. For since God calls us to fear him, fearing God is therefore a loving response to his will.
 3. If we start from the fear of the Lord, we will find that the love of the Lord follows because what makes the Lord fearful is also what makes him alluring to us.
 - a. While we fear God because of his absolute power, we are also drawn to that power in admiration.
 - b. While we fear God because of his absolute holiness, his holiness is also mysterious and wonderful to us.
 - c. The fear of the Lord—assuming that it is not merely a shallow fear of punishment but a genuine awe of God himself—actually strengthens our love for him.

- d. Fearing the Lord and loving the Lord are not mutually exclusive. They require one another and feed into one another.
- B. How does the *fear* of the Lord differ from the *love* of the Lord?
1. The difference has to do with two aspects of God's relationship toward us—his transcendence/greatness on the one hand; his immanence/closeness on the other.
 2. The love of the Lord emphasizes the Lord's closeness toward us.
 3. The fear of the Lord emphasizes his supremacy over us.
 4. The fear of the Lord reminds us of this: Even though God is now our dearest friend and Father in the Lord Jesus Christ, that still does not make God our peer! God remains our heavenly Father who has absolute authority over our lives.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How do the fear and the love of the Lord relate to one another? How do they support one another? (2) How does fear of the Lord differ from love of him?

IV. Serve the Lord (Joshua 24:14)

- A. Serving the Lord is one way that we respond to God in love and in holy fear.
- B. Lest we think of serving the Lord in purely external or mechanical ways, the Holy Spirit adds the words, "in sincerity and in faithfulness."
- C. The service of the Lord is practice of the fear of the Lord. It is to do the Lord's bidding.
- D. But have we considered what exactly is involved in serving the Lord?
 1. The very first thing that comes to mind when service is mentioned is that those who serve place themselves at the disposal of the one whom they serve. (e.g., waiters, domestic helpers, flight attendants, employees, etc.) To serve the Lord is therefore to put ourselves at his disposal.
 2. To serve the Lord sincerely requires much more than an outward conformity or activity. At its heart, serving the Lord means that we genuinely acknowledge that his will is above our wills at all times.
 3. Sincere service entails that we have made space in our lives for the will of our Lord. And it even means that we genuinely love his will in the depths of our souls.
 4. The strongest way I can describe serving the Lord is to use this paradoxical way of phrasing:
 - TO SERVE THE LORD IS TO HAVE NO WILL OF YOUR OWN.
 - TO SERVE THE LORD IS TO HAVE HIS WILL AS YOUR OWN.
 5. Serving the Lord is far more than a few isolated activities, however important and necessary they may be. Serving the Lord involves the totality of who you are. In its fullest, form, to serve the Lord is to have no will of your own but God's.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is involved in serving the Lord? How far-reaching is this service?

V. Put Away Idols (Joshua 24:14)

- A. In the case of Israel, and at this particular point in Israel's life, the Lord specifies how he wants Israel to serve him: "Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD."
- B. The way we read these words can be both as an *invitation* as well as an *exhortation*.
 - 1. It is an exhortation to start anew with the Lord.
 - 2. It is an exhortation to stay faithful in the sincere service and fear of the Lord.
- C. Whatever gods and goddesses, spirits or demons that the ancestors of Israel and the Amorites worship, Israel must see to it that they say *no* to all these things.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How should we read Joshua's exhortation to Israel?

VI. Choosing the Lord—or Not (Joshua 24:15)

- A. In order that Israel knows that idolatry is out of the question, that it is either God's way or the highway, Joshua tells Israel to choose between the Lord and the idols.
- B. Joshua is basically saying to Israel, "If you think it is bad or undesirable to serve the Lord YHWH, then go find yourself another god, whether it's from the gods of the past or the gods of the present."
- C. As the Lord Jesus teaches us in Matthew 6:24, no man can serve two masters.
 - 1. We cannot serve both God and Money or some other created thing.
 - 2. It is God or none of him. That is the radical decision that Israel has to make. God has given himself to Israel. And Israel must give herself to him.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Joshua emphasize the importance of choosing the Lord? (2) What wisdom does Mt 6:24 offer concerning our loyalties?

VII. The Call of the Hour

- A. Since we are joined to Israel in the Lord Jesus Christ, these words echo down to our generation as well. God our royal Father is calling us to be faithful to him alone. He is calling us to fear him and love him above all gods, whether it's the gods our ancestors worshiped or the gods of our present day and age.
- B. The question for us:
 - Is it still beautiful in your eyes to fear and to serve the Lord? Or has loving the Lord become undesirable in your heart?
 - Where are our hearts with the Lord today, right this moment?
 - How far (or how close) are our hearts from the idols of our parents and our culture? Are we closer to the idols of our age than to the Lord?—Those are the questions that each of us in this room must ask of ourselves if we are to keep on abiding in the Lord.
- C. Concerning the gods of our ancestors, the idols of the past.
 - 1. These gods had different types.
 - a. Personalized gods: celestial human-animal hybrid beings, divinized sages and warriors, etc.

- b. Ideological gods: race, culture, various national identities, etc.
 2. But fearing and serving the Lord requires that we honor the Lord above the idols and idolatrous values of our forefathers.
 3. To someone from a traditional culture that holds on to the idols and values of their age, a servant of the Lord might seem quite liberal, because the Lord wants to correct our values—even the ones we hold most dear, even the ones our parents may have taught us when we were young.
 4. The Lord wants to put our values in proper relationship with himself.
 - a. Those values that are good (e.g., family, authority, hard work) can be redeemed by the Lord and made to serve his larger, life-giving purposes.
 - b. Those values that are destructive—such as male chauvinism and cultural narcissism—the Lord wants to remove and set us free from so that we can be the kind of human beings he wants us to be.
 5. *Will we fear the Lord by choosing him above these idols and values?* Do we see that the Lord is good and that serving him is beautiful? Or would we rather go back to our old ways and serve the gods of your forefathers?
- D. Concerning the gods of our contemporaries, the idols of the present.
 1. For Israel in Joshua 24, the idols of the present were “the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.”
 2. Many of the gods of our fellow Singaporeans began life as good values.
 3. They may be our desires for success and recognition, pleasure, wellness, and knowledge.
 4. Because these values are not subjected to God, they can take on a life of their own. They become workaholicism, hedonism, and narcissism respectively.
 5. It is hard to rid ourselves of these gods because worshiping them brings near-instant rewards—the praises of men, a sense of achievement, or simply the ability to get whatever we want.
 6. So when it comes to the false gods of the present, the question is the same as before: *Will we fear the Lord by choosing him above these idols and values?* Do we see that the Lord is good and that serving him is indeed beautiful? Or would we rather completely immerse ourselves in our culture and devote our lives to the service of its gods?

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How is the Lord’s call to Israel relevant to us? (2) What were the gods of our own forefathers? What are the gods of our present day society? (3) What are some of your own remaining idols?

VIII. As For Me and My House (Joshua 24:15)

- A. If we need encouragement not to go back into idolatry, God himself gives us an inspiring example in the leader he has chosen.
- B. To this day, Joshua’s words are the motto of many Christian homes: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”
- C. *Is the Lord a priority in each of our lives as well as the lives of our families?*
 - Parents, do your children get the sense that you are far more concerned for their salvation and Christ-likeness than for their success in life?
 - Are prayer and Scripture a regular part of your family’s life?

- Most of all, are you discernibly growing in the character of the Lord Jesus Christ?
- Who is the *real* Lord of our homes? Our culture? Our parent's expectations? The Lord himself?

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Joshua respond to his own charge? (2) How will you answer those diagnostic questions above?

IX. "I Chose You"

Surprisingly, the strength and the will to choose the Lord comes not from us but from the Lord himself. This is the secret of our abiding strength: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you" (Jn 15:16). If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have been chosen by God. You belong to him. You are loved and valued by him. There is nothing in this world that can separate you from God. Therefore, choose the Lord.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Where do we derive the strength and the will to choose the Lord? (2) Where in your life do you need to draw strength from the Lord's choosing of you? For what difficult decisions do you need to sense the Lord's choice of you? (3) What are some ways you can remind yourself of God's choice of you?