

**Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.** <sup>15</sup> But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

<sup>16</sup> Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! <sup>17</sup> It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our fathers 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 traveled. <sup>18</sup> 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.”

<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.”

<sup>21</sup> But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the LORD.”

<sup>22</sup> Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD.”

“Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.

<sup>23</sup> “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

<sup>24</sup> And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.” (NIV84)

Theme: Walking the Talk

**As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.** Well-known words. It’s a verse that many Christians would put in their top 10. We have a vinyl wall-art decal of these words up on one of our walls. A good number of Christian households have these words on a plaque, in a frame, or in some other form hanging up on a wall. For good reason.

It’s a nice thought—we, in this house, together as a family are going to serve the Lord.

It’s a nice thought—but it wouldn’t be even nicer if you actually followed these words. They are easier said than done. As the old saying goes—“you can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk?” Or, can you walk the talk? Do you practice what you preach?

Today we see what it takes to actually walk the talk.

For years the Israelites served the Egyptians as slaves. But God remembered his people and sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt. He brought 10 plagues on the land to convince Pharaoh to let his people leave. And when the Egyptians went after the Israelites, God caused the world’s most powerful army to be drowned in the waters of the Red Sea. During the 40 years the people wandered the wilderness God sent manna—bread from heaven, for them to eat. And he made sure they had plenty of water. When countries attacked them, God led them to a victory.

Finally they entered the Promised Land of Canaan under a new leader named Joshua. The first thing they did was march around a walled city. And when they shouted and blew their trumpets God caused the walls of the city to fall down. God would do the same again and again. Through the Lord the Israelites destroyed city after city and defeated nation after nation. And now Joshua was getting old. So he called the people together. And he addressed them one last time.

After reminding them of everything the Lord had done for them, he tells these believers that they have a choice. **If serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living.** If they decided to reject the one true God—they had two other options to consider. The first was to go after the gods that Abraham’s father, Terah, worshiped. Or they could worship the gods of the Amorites. It wasn’t much of a choice. Both were worthless. One was made by the hands of humans out of inanimate items such as gold, silver, or wood. And the Israelites were living in the land of the Amorites. They were worthless—powerless to help anyone. They didn’t even exist! So if they wanted to reject God, those were their

choices. They could worship the living, all powerful Lord who helped them. Or they could serve worthless figments of the imagination. It's the same options that we have today. We could serve God. Or we could serve something else—the things of the world. And you can't serve both. As Jesus said in Matthew six, **No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.** You can either serve the Lord and follow him, or you can serve your sinful nature and go after the ways of the world—you can't do both. But isn't that what we often try to do. We try to serve the Lord, we belong to a congregation, we worship the Lord, we, at times, obey his Word. But at other times we follow our sinful nature—we do what we want to do. We indulge our sinful passions and desires, we partake in sin and debauchery, we selfishly go after our own interests instead of what God wants. We try to serve two masters—God and our sinful human nature. But that's not possible—you can either serve God or your sinful nature. And let's make something totally clear. This is not a choice to believe in the Lord. We were born as enemies of God who hated him and wanted nothing to do with him. His Word is offense to our reason. We would never choose to believe in him if it was up to him. Jesus said in John 15, **you did not choose me, but I chose you.** Or in John six, **no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.** We have a choice to say no to God and yes to the world. But we cannot say yes to God. No this is a decision for believers. The Holy Spirit has already brought you to faith. And now you have the choice to reject God, or to serve someone else.

The people responded as they should have. **Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods...We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.** They followed Joshua's example. They were going to serve the Lord. It's not a choice they made, but one worked by the Holy Spirit. The same stands for us. We too will serve the Lord. Because of the Holy Spirit.

But why would they choose to serve the Lord and forsake the gods of those around them? Why would you reject what everyone else is doing? Why would you deny your sinful nature? Why would you not do what feels good and right? The Israelites were motivated by God's grace. It was what God had done for them in the past that led them to

obey him. It was his love for them that led them to show love to him by serving him. They said in verses 17 and 18 that they would serve the Lord because, **It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our fathers 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 traveled. And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land.**

Their motivation is the same as yours. You serve the Lord willingly because of his grace and mercy. Because he has shown love to you in the past and will continue to do so you willingly serve him. For he came down to this earth in order to save you. He was willingly nailed to a cross even though he had done no wrong. For on the cross he took the guilt of all our sins upon himself. He suffered through the guilt and punishment of all our sins so that we might be saved. And then he rose from the dead so that all who believe in him might rise to live with him in heaven forever. It is his grace and love that leads you to want to serve him. The salvation he won for you leads you to say, **as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.**

But it's easier said than done. You can say it all you want. But it's hard to walk the talk.

Just think of all the times you have failed to do so. You say you are going to serve the Lord. But you often do just the opposite. Many times you let the things of this world get in your way. You may place your jobs, your hobbies, the programs your children are in, or even you family itself ahead of God. Things like money, fun, or your reputation become your god because you place them as more important than the Lord in your lives. You have failed to walk the talk in the past—so it stands to reason that you will sin against him in the future.

Joshua told the people the same thing. **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. 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.** Our sins deserve God's wrath and punishment. God is a holy God who will not put up with sin. He is a jealous God who doesn't let sin go unpunished. So if

the Israelites rebelled against him as they had done in the past, they would be destroyed. And as we all know, we can't help but sin against God. And so we deserve the same thing.

Joshua was telling the Israelites that they couldn't obey the Lord. The same stands for us—we constantly fail to walk the talk. But Christ did. He always obeyed the Lord—he walked the talk. It is only in Christ that God considers us obedient. In our baptism our sins are washed away and we are covered with the robes of Christ's righteousness. Christ's perfect life becomes ours. So when God looks at us he sees pure and innocent children. He doesn't see those who deserve his wrath and punishment; through faith in his Son, he considers us pure and innocent just like his Son. And it is only through faith in Christ we can obey the Lord. For he leads and motivates us to obey him. His gospel empowers us to obedience. Remembering this grace and mercy of God leads us to rededicate ourselves to the Lord. That is what the people of Israel did. When Joshua warned them of their past sin and their future rebellion, the people of Israel again reiterated their dedication to him. In verse 21 they said, **No! We will serve the LORD.** Then again in verse 24, **We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.** That's three times in our text for today that the people said that they would serve the Lord. Motivated by his grace, they rededicated themselves to God time and time again. And we do well to follow their example.

When they rededicated their lives to God Joshua told the people, **Then throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.** Get rid of everything that gets in the way of the Lord. By nature we make idols out of the things of this world. So again and again we have to check our priorities to see where God lies in our lives. We strive to place him first in our hearts. And we yield our hearts to him.

And when we serve the Lord, we think of worshiping the Lord. We make it a point to worship him whenever we can. Nothing is more important in our lives that praise the one who saved us. And we serve him with our whole heart. Not because it's expected of us, or in threat of punishment—but we worship him willingly because the salvation he won for us. And we make it a point to those around us. If we are

witnesses to each other, than we ought to encourage our fellow believers to worship him and worship him often.

In verse 24 the people responded to Joshua, **We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.** Obey him. Believing is also obeying. Faith leads to obedience. You believe what Christ has done for you, so you want to obey him. You strive to follow his Word. You don't purposefully go against his will. But you obey him to the best of your ability. And when you fail, you know that God forgives you through his son.

But the Hebrew doesn't exactly say that they would obey the Lord. Rather it says, that they would **listen to his voice.** Which means that they would listen to his Word. We do the same. We do our best to read the Word at home. To study his Word in Bible Class. As Christians, saved by Christ, we want to know more about him—who he is and what he has done. We want to know what his will for us is. So we read, study, and listen to his Word. That is part of serving the Lord. It is part of walking the talk and serving the Lord.

**As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.** Walk the Talk. Practice what you preach. Put aside the things of this world and put Christ first in your lives. Obey him, serve him, and listen to his Word. And when you fail, know that in Christ you have forgiveness. He makes us obedient to God and through him we have eternal life. Amen.