

We bow our hearts in prayer: Dear Father, we give You thanks for Your undeserved love which You have lavished upon us and has caused You to choose us to be with You for all eternity. Thank You for Your gracious care in temporal as well as spiritual affairs. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Our text for meditation on this national Day of Thanksgiving are a few selected verses from Joshua chapter 24.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God. ...

"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. And 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."

Then 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." ^(ESV)

These are Your Words, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. ^(John 17:17)

Dear Fellow Thankful Redeemed,

Chapter 24 is the last chapter of the book of Joshua.

Joshua, you might recall, was the one the Lord chose to lead Israel after Moses died.

He led them into the Promised Land and through the Conquest of Canaan.

Our text, is Joshua's last recorded sermon to God's people.

I suppose that this could seem like an odd text to be read on a national day of Thanksgiving.

There is nothing specifically about giving thanks. No explicit words of praise.

Instead, the Lord recounted to Israel through Joshua, how He had

taken their father Abraham out of idolatry,

given him a child and grandsons and made him into a great nation in Egypt.

How He had

rescued the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery,

preserved them through 40 years of wilderness wandering,

fought and delivered them against greater and mightier armies and even sorcerers,

brought them to the Promised Land (all as He had promised He would to Abraham),

provided a bountiful and good land (flowing with milk and honey) for them,

and given them rest.

This was a recounting of the Lord's grace upon them.

Notice who was doing all the actions. It wasn't the people, or any other gods, but the Lord.

God makes this clear from the beginning when He called Abraham out of idolatry;

it wasn't based on any goodness of Abraham, but on the Lord's gracious decision and call.

And now among them He, recounting their victories and the good life they enjoyed, emphasized their lack of involvement saying,

"...it was not by your sword or by your bow.

I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them.

You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant."

Notice also that much of this sermon had to do with their physical well-being: the deliverance, the protection, the provisions, all were for their bodies as well as souls

Now, in contrast to all of this, there were those idols.

The foreign ones that God called Abraham out of, even the powerless ones of Egypt, and the ones that Balaam would have called on, as well as the conquered Canaanites. What had any of these idols done? Whom had they delivered? What promises did they fulfill?

Thus Joshua exhorted them to put these worthless idols and powerless gods away from them. How easy do you suppose this was for them?

I would bet that it would have been difficult if Joshua had just told them to burn them, or break or melt them down,

How difficult to destroy and apostate from something you have served for years, and that you had credited was the reason for your successes!

But Joshua instead used the good news of God's salvation for them.

He recounted God's gracious calling of them, God's success for them,

God's protection and provision, and God's steadfast and completely fulfilled promises. This is what turned the people. This is what convinced them to put away any other gods.

...

As Joshua's admonition was spoken and recorded for God's people in his day, so we, as God's people, should examine and consider his words in our own lives.

In our time and culture, little figurines aren't the foreign gods that necessarily tempt us.

Our gods today tend to be more subtle, not set up in household shrines,

but enshrined in how we go about our daily lives: what we adore with our money, to whom or what we devote our time, what rituals make up our daily routines, whom or what we venerate with our undivided attention, and where and how our services are rendered.

These are all indications of who our God is... or gods are.

Do you serve money? Trust the stock market? Bow down to popular opinion?

Are you totally devoted to family, so as to excuse them from devotion to God?

Do you honor athletes and coaches, attend their services,

and offer your voices in their praise and your money in their sanctuaries, while neglecting and ignoring the presence of the one who has saved you?

So what do you do when, not if, but when, you discover a foreign god in your life?

It's hard to apostate from something that has given you pleasure, or made your life easy. or made you think that it was the reason for your success or popularity.

It's difficult to remove your trust from what you have perceived has made you secure.

Just as Joshua recounted the Lord's history of fulfilled promises for Israel, so can we, and more so when we see not only the fulfilled promises by God to Abraham and Israel, but even promises that go all the way back, to Adam at the beginning.

After Eve first bowed down to the devil and sought wisdom in the forbidden fruit, the Lord promised one to come from her seed.

This promise includes what Joshua recounted, and more as that promised Seed descended through David on down to Mary and was fulfilled, as we will soon celebrate, in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And let this recounting be recognized as what it truly is, a thanksgiving to the Lord, words of praise to Him who, in spite of us, has graciously called you to hear of Jesus Christ and believe that He your Savior: the perfect Man who had but one God, the Triune God, and who never put His trust in men, or any creature, or created thing, but trusted the Lord's Word throughout life and even at death, and was found blameless so that He was raised from the dead to give life to you, who believe and trust in Him.

People of God, we like to hear Joshua's admonition: "**choose this day,**"

and believe that if once we have chosen... and have set our minds and hearts on God, we will never fall away, never choose another god.

But this isn't the case. Your heart is a sinful, fickle thing that changes devotions on a whim. Consider also the good intentions of the Israelites that day.

"**Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods,**" they said.

And yet, only two chapters later we read that a generation grew up who did not know the Lord.

If the Lord is your choice, then know that you were His choice first, from eternity.

He has called you out of idolatry, He delivered you from the power of the Devil, through the Jesus Christ, the Passover Lamb without spot or blemish.

He sustains you, He provides for you, He protects you, and He will keep you to deliver you to the eternal Promised Land.

When you struggle with your idols and foreign gods, then recount His great signs to you, your **washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit**, your Baptism into perfection and spiritual life, and into His family.

Come and receive the *Lord's crucified and risen body and blood*,

proclaim the Lord's death until He comes with your fellow former idolaters.

Through His Word, He will show you the proper attitude of the heart towards His creation, not to serve it and so be enslaved to it, but to be free to use it to serve Him and your neighbor.

And the Lord will continue to show you His steadfast love, which endures forever.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

Soli Deo Gloria