

ONE CLEAR VOICE

"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the others' side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24:15.

Joshua knew that the people who surrounded him, while ostensibly serving Jehovah, were secretly worshipping the ancient idols of their Mesopotamian fathers; at least, many of them were doing so. Some of them were worshipping the gods of the people whom they had displaced, and they were setting up the images of Baalim in their habitations. Nominally the people were worshipers of Jehovah, but in reality many of them were worshipping strange gods.

Intolerant of doublemindedness, Joshua challenged the people to make a clear-cut decision, urging them to serve Jehovah with sincerity, and, therefore, to put away all their graven images. He shut them up to one choice, and that was between the true God and idols. Joshua realized that their safety consisted in their abstaining from the heathenism which was pressing them on all sides, and in their absolute loyalty to Jehovah. The words of our text were uttered with something of the tenderness of a father and something of the majesty of a king.

Joshua reminded the people of God's mercies to them since they had become a nation, and challenged them to remember these mercies and to faithfully serve their God. He urged them not to have anything to do with idols, for God would not accept their half-service, that is, worshipping Him with their lips and hankering after the idols of the heathen with their hearts.

After rehearsing the Lord's dealings with His people, he also rehearsed the peoples' dealings with the Lord. He recalled their murmurings, their reluctant service, their dubious homage, their uncertain attachment, and their frequent revolts. He called to their remembrance God's guidance in the past, reviewed the promise of their future success, and explained the condition on which their prosperity depended. He called upon them to choose whom they would serve -- the God of their fathers, and enjoy peace and prosperity, or the idols of the heathen, and incur ruin and death.

To assist them in making the right decision, Joshua declared his own: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Hear the grand old crusader as he implies, "You may hesitate, my mind is made up once for all. Judge as you will, but my verdict is already given, and my children agree therein. As for me, and my house, we do not have any reverence for the demons of Canaan or the myths of Egypt, who could not preserve their own worshipers, but we will serve the Lord." He might have added, "If my house will not, still, as for me, I will. I will serve God and live for Him. His law shall be my rule, and His work shall be my joy." Such a personal example is eloquent beyond the power of words.

Joshua's clear avowal was not a trick of eloquence or a resolve made for the first time in order to influence his audience. He had lived in such a manner that his avowal carried weight with all who heard it, for Joshua had always been a man of determined and firm step. His decision implied that all hesitation was gone. His state of heart was superior to the evil influence of others. His decision was solemnly made, openly avowed, and earnestly adhered to throughout the remainder of his life.

In these days of multiple voices and confused and conflicting loyalties, it is refreshing and inspiring to hear one clear voice above the noise of the multitude. The nation of Israel was in one of its most tumultuous times --

just getting started as an organized nation, and surrounded by the heathen cultures of the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Which form of government should they adopt, which culture should they follow, which system of education, even which religion should they consider as being an incentive for the new nation? The answer was too clear and the people, seeking for an complicated solution, passed over the real solution. Then Joshua, the elder statesman of Israel, declared his own commitment in a resolution that was literally heard around the world, and it continues to be one of the most frequently quoted statements. What were the characteristics of this vow spoken with the clear voice of Joshua which rallied the people back to Jehovah and remains as our grand example to this present hour?

I. It Was Personal.

"As for me" said the man of God. Joshua believed in religious freedom. Never for one moment did he try to intimidate the people and coerce them into following the Lord Whom he knew, loved, and served. He gave them free choice and ample opportunity to serve "the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell." Joshua knew that every man has to stand before God on his own, that a blanket endorsement of Jehovah by the nation would not suffice for the individual. Therefore, he let the people know that they had a choice, as they always had. But, he also let it be known emphatically that regardless of their choices, his would not be changed. If the whole nation returned to the idolatrous heathenism of previous generations, or if they embraced the gods of the nations around them, Joshua committed to serve the Lord. He did not wait to see which way the crowd was going before he started himself. Nor did he weigh the possibilities of his prestige or his position, but instead plunged headlong into a personal declaration of his faith and fidelity to Almighty God.

One cannot help but wonder today how many of God's people would remain loyal, even nominally affiliated with the cause of Christ, if such cause were to become suddenly unpopular in our country. In a society in which it is convenient and beneficial for one to be known as a Christian, it is our concern to know if we would stand firm for the Lord if our business or social position were in jeopardy. It is time that we accepted the fact of our personal responsibility and individual judgment before God. As far as discipleship is concerned, we live in a spiritual monarchy, not a democracy. We do not wait to see how the vote of other Christians may go before we act; we are to act as our King directs from the throne in glory.

II. It Was Paternal.

Joshua said, "As for me and my house." Joshua was not departing from his concept and individual freedom, but he was recognizing the responsibility as the head of his house. As far as he could possibly extend his example and influence, he intended to see that those of his household served the Lord with him. Too many fathers today are not concerned about leading their families into a relationship with God and a relevant witness to the world. They have a confused image of fatherhood, seeing themselves as nothing but breadwinners and wage earners. They are involved in tiresome days of battle in the economic jungle of our industrial society, away from their families long hours, and often many days. When they are not at work, they are active in clubs, sports, recreation, and hobbies which take them away from their families again. Consequently,

any religious direction is received from mother and, if she is too busy, the church, or not at all. But what child is going to church if both father and mother are too busy to care?

One of modern parenthood's most ridiculous attempts to be magnanimous is contained in the statement, "I don't want to force my religion on my child, so I will just let him find one for himself." No conscientious parent lets a child choose his own school, and clothing, and control the use of his own money, until he has been properly trained and led. We instruct our children in the ways of business, social amenities, cultural enjoyments, and physical hygiene. We teach them how to walk, how to talk, how to eat, how to talk on the telephone, how to swim, how to drive a car, even how to get married. Then, in the most important area of his entire existence, we ignore all responsibility and leave the child without any direction or example to follow in trying to understand God and his relationship to Him. The home is the greatest redemptive society on the face of the earth, and the parent who ignores or refuses his opportunity loses that favored part that God had in His redemptive plan for him to fulfill.

III. It was Positive.

"We will serve the Lord." Joshua did not say that he would lead his family into deeper psychological analysis of their spiritual confrontation, or that he would attempt to arouse a spiritual emotion toward God. He said that they intended to serve the Lord. They, he and his family, were going to be actively involved in every expression of God's grace in their personal lives, in their home lives, and in their society. They would accept the problems of their day as their own, and work diligently to correct them under the leadership of the Lord. They would deliberately seek out those who needed a loving heart, a helping hand, and a benevolent spirit. They would recognize that every talent and opportunity they had was God's way of revealing Himself to them and using them on earth. They would take the emotions that they felt in public worship and apply them. They would put their religion into practice outside the walls of the tabernacle or temple in which they sang praises to God. They were not taking stands against particular things, but they were taking a positive stand for God. They knew that if they were busy serving the Lord they would not have time to serve Satan.

IV. It Was Public.

"Joshua said unto all the people" (24:2). His dedication was not made known to just a few close friends, but to all the people. To friend and foe alike, to believer and unbeliever, to the righteous and to the ungodly, he made a public declaration of his faith and his intention to serve God. Christ made it clear that we, too, are to confess Him before men, and He warned us of the eternal consequences of refusing to do so. "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32,33). Christ does not want secret admirers. Those who would serve as His disciples must deny themselves, take up the cross and follow Him. Christ also made it plain that those who are not with Him are against Him, and that no man can serve two masters at the same time.

In a clear voice let us, like Joshua, declare to the world that as for ourselves, and our families, we are going to serve the Lord actively, publicly, and faithfully.