

Houston Colonial Hills Conference 1995-05

Joshua 24:14

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of decision making in our lives, highlighting the significance of making good decisions that determine our destiny and have eternal consequences.

Duration: 29:26

Scripture: Exodus 20:3-4, Exodus 20:7, Joshua 24:14, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 2:7, Hebrews 11:24

Topics: "Joshua"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of making decisions in life, particularly decisions that align with God's will. He encourages listeners to be people of prayer and suggests creating a prayer list to stay focused. The speaker also highlights the significance of making a total commitment to the Lord and living according to His blueprint. He references a poem by James Russell Lowell that emphasizes the eternal consequences of choosing between truth and falsehood. The sermon concludes with a reading from Joshua 24:14, where Joshua urges the Israelites to choose whom they will serve, and the people respond by affirming their commitment to serve the Lord.

Transcript

24, and we'll begin reading in verse 14. Joshua, chapter 24, verse 14. Now, therefore, fear the Lord.

Serve him in sincerity and in truth. Put away the gods which your father served on the other side of the river and in Egypt. Serve the Lord.

And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of 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." So the people answered and said, Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods. For the Lord our God is he who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the people through whom we passed.

As the Lord drove out from before us all the people, even the Amorites, who dwelt in the land, we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God. Joshua said to the people, You cannot serve the Lord, for he's the Holy

God. That is, you can't serve the Lord and serve other gods at the same time.

That's what they want. They wanted a mixed worship, to serve the Lord and serve other gods. That's why he said, You cannot serve the Lord.

He knew what was in their hearts. You cannot serve the Lord, for he's a Holy God. He's a jealous God.

He will not forgive your transgressions, nor your sins, if you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods. Then he will turn and do you harm, consume you after he has done you good. Decisions, decisions, decisions.

Life is made up of decisions. You'd be surprised how many decisions you've made already today. You've made decisions at the breakfast table, whether you eat Cheerios or shredded wheat.

You've made decisions as to what to wear. You made decisions as to how you were going to get to the chapel today, if you drove a car. And when you go to a restaurant, you get that menu, and you say, Decisions, decisions, decisions.

These decisions are killing me. You know, what am I going to choose from the menu? Some of the decisions are really minor, not too important. Others are decisions you make for all of life, and for eternity as well.

It's amazing, isn't it, when you stop to think of it? Lowell, James Russell Lowell, wrote that poem once, to every man and nation comes a moment to decide, in the strife of truth and falsehood, for the good or evil side, some great cause, God's new Messiah. Offering each the bloom of light, parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right, and the choice goes on forever, puts the darkness and the light. We are not machined to do God's will.

We're not programmed, to use a word from today's culture, we're not programmed to do the inevitable. Without any choice, we must make decisions in life, and if we say we can't decide, we have decided. During the second world war, there was a ship that had been torpedoed, and the fellows were all taking to their life to the lifeboat, and there was one fellow on the ship, and his mates down below were yelling to him, Jeff, we'll get you.

He said, I can't decide, but he had decided that he went down with the ship. Failure to decide is a decision in itself, isn't it? You think of some of the good decisions that were made in the Bible. I often think of Abel.

The Bible doesn't say how he knew, but his parents doubtless communicated to Abel that a sinful man could approach God only on the ground of a sacrificial substitute. That the blood of a substitute must be shed if a sinful man was ever to be to draw near to God, and Abel decided to believe that. Brother Cain decided not to, but Abel decided to believe that.

He might not have understood all the ramifications of substitutionary sacrifice, but he came God's blood-sprinkled way. That was a great decision, wasn't it? On the golden streets of heaven all men hope to walk some day, but so many are not willing to accept God's only way. So, while others build on good works or opinions, if they may, hallelujah, I'm depending on the blood.

The soul-cleansing blood of the Savior I've been washed in the crimson flow. Though the world may say this hope some other way, hallelujah, I'm depending on the blood. Abel made a great decision that day.

Noah made a great decision, didn't he? God said, Noah, I'm going to destroy the world with a flood, and Noah could very well have said, what's a flood, Lord? Please explain the language you're using, because up to that time in the history of the world there never had been a flood, and as far as we know there never had been rain. And God said, I'm going to destroy the world with a flood. You go and you build an ark for the saving of your house.

If Noah had gone down to the Encyclopedia Britannica in the local library and looked up floods, couldn't have found anything. No history. No history of floods.

He built an ark. He built an ark in obedience to the word of God, and the flood came, and he and his household were saved. Abraham made some wonderful decisions in life.

God called him to come out from the land of Ur, Mesopotamia, and he didn't know where he was going to go, but he knew that God was going to lead him, and he said, I'll go. He decided to go. He said, in effect, I'd rather walk in the dark with God than walk alone in the light, and he didn't make a mistake by believing God.

God's the only believable person in the universe, really. If you can't believe the word of God, who can you believe? Then, of course, God told him to take his son up and offer him up as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah. I won't tell you that was a decision he had to make.

One of the hardest decisions in life, but he did it. He was willing to offer Isaac, and God saw it. God provided that ram caught by its horns in the thicket as a substitute.

Joseph, one of my favorite Bible characters, Joseph. I longed to get to heaven, and after I've been with the Lord Jesus, I want to meet Joseph, and I think particularly now of that day when he was faced with temptation, strong temptation, came in like a flood, and he wriggled out of his coat and left that woman holding his coat. He lost his coat, but he gained a crown.

He made a great decision. He would resist temptation, and God has honored him for it. Think of Moses and some of the marvelous decisions that Moses made.

Hebrews chapter 11, the essence of greatness that we find here. Hebrews 11 24. By faith, Moses, when he came of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

He renounced the fame of Egypt. I mean, that's really big stuff to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. If it's fame you're after in life, but he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, it says in verse 24.

Then not only that, he renounced the pleasures of Egypt. Verse 25, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. It's a decision, choosing rather.

He refused the passing pleasures of sin. The passing pleasures, that's quite a choice. He thought suffering affliction with God's people was greater than the pleasures of Egypt.

And then he refused the treasures of Egypt. How do you like that? Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he looked to the reward. And he renounced the politics of Egypt.

By faith, he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. I mean, the king was the ace politician there. Joseph wasn't afraid of him, for he endured as seeing him who was invisible.

And then he refused the religion of Egypt. By faith, he kept the Passover. Well, I want to tell you, the Passover wasn't the religion of Egypt.

They worshipped the sun, they worshipped the river, they worshipped the beetle, and everything else. Everything but the true God. By faith, he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

Consistently, Moses made right decisions, and decisions determine destiny. And the reason we're talking about Moses today in Houston in 1995 is because of the decisions he made. I tell you, proper decisions enable you to go on talking long after your body's in the grave.

And he's witnessing to all future generations. We read about Joshua. Joshua made a great decision.

He said, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. He's memorialized in God's book forever. Ruth, what a wonderful woman that Ruth was, you know.

I don't think there's a greater example of full commitment in the Old Testament than you have in Ruth. She said, entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return for following after thee. Where you go, I will go.

Wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried.

The Lord do so to me, and more also of us, but death part you and me. I tell you, that's decision. You know, the patriarchs of the Old Testament, when the Jewish patriarchs, when they died, they'd say, look, carry my bones up and bury them back in the land, you know.

She didn't say that. She said, well, you die, I'll die. There will I be buried.

Greatness. There's a greatness about that woman. Esther.

Esther, a decision-making process there. God raised her up. It's just the right time in the history of his people.

And she said, I will go to the king, which is against the law, and if I perish, I perish. Wow. We need some of that.

We need some of that grit and some of that steel in the evangelical circles today, where men are compromising, you know. Some of the men that we've respected down through the years are saying the most untoward things. She said, if I perish, I will perish.

And I love Daniel's three friends, too, and the decisions they made. Will you bow down and worship the golden image? Listen to what they said. Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and he will deliver us from your hand, O king.

But if not, let it be known to you that we will not serve your gods, nor will we worship the golden image which you set up. That's it. Today, it's a system of compromises.

Every worker now, you know, just take it easy. Don't rock the boat, you know. Don't create waves.

These men were made of better stuff than that. I think of some of the bad decisions that were made in the Bible, and you go right back to the beginning, Adam and Eve, you know. You know how God appeared to them and told them that they could eat of all the fruit of the garden, except one tree.

Don't eat of that. And then Satan appears to them, and he said, please have some fruit. Be my guest.

They say, uh-uh, we mustn't eat of that. Who told you you mustn't eat of that, you know? God doesn't want you to become like him. That's the trouble.

He's withholding from you something that's good. And Eve had to make a decision. She had to decide whether God was lying or whether Satan was lying.

And she decided that God was lying. It's kind of serious, isn't it? She decided that God was lying, that Satan was telling the truth. Different to all the hospitals and funeral homes and all the heartache and sorrow and pain and suffering that are in the world today are the result of that decision.

They are. It's incredible, isn't it? You say, well, it was by Adam that sin entered the world. Yeah, as by one man sin entered the world.

Adam was the head of the human race, the federal head of the human race, and he's held responsible for it, but it was Eve who made the decision, wasn't it? I tell you, that leaves me almost breathless when I think of that one decision, and all of the sorrow and bitterness and suffering that have come into the world as a result of that. People say, oh, well, sin isn't so bad. It isn't bad.

It's worse than they know. Esau, we talked about Esau yesterday, the terrible decision he made. He sold his birthright for a morsel of food.

Saul, Saul in his ceaseless hatred of David, and he comes to the end and he says, indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly. And finally he goes and he consults the witch of Endor, another bad decision in clear violation of the word of God. Samson, poor guy.

Samson, so strong physically and so weak morally. Decision after decision he made. Won't you ever learn, Samson? I mustn't say too much against him.

It's amazing that God looked down and in spite of all that failure, he saw faith there. And it's interesting enough, Samson is mentioned in Hebrews 11. If you and I were writing the Bible, he wouldn't be.

But he's mentioned in Hebrews 11 among the great men of faith because God could see the faith. Jonah, Jonah, bad decision. Of course, he made some good ones too.

Bad decision. Call of God, refusing the call of God. Spending time in the belly of a whale till he came to his senses.

Then he went to Nineveh, preached eight words, and revival breaks out. I mean, eight words in English. He didn't speak in English.

Pilate, Pilate, decision making. What then do you want me to do with him who is called the king of the Jews? Been warned by his wife, but he's wavering. So Pilate, wanting to gratify the people, released Barabbas to them.

What a decision. They delivered Jesus after he had scourged him to be crucified. Jesus is still standing in Pilate's hall.

Friendless, forsaken, betrayed by all. Tarkin, what meaneth this sudden call? What will you do with Jesus? What will you do with Jesus? Neutral you cannot be. Someday your soul will be asking, what will he do with me? I think of momentous decisions that were made in the history of the world.

I think of Luther and the decision he made to justification by faith. He accepted the truth of justification by faith, and he rocked the religious world, rocked it, and led to the Great Reformation. I think of Napoleon, the decision he made to attack Russia, forgetting that winter was coming on.

What a decision. And Hitler made the same mistake. I mean, didn't he learn from history? Those who don't learn from history are doomed to relive it.

And Hitler should have learned that if he learned anything. He was demon-possessed, that's why he didn't. He repeated Napoleon's mistake and got bogged down in the snow in Russia.

You know, there are momentous decisions that face us in life, and one of the most momentous is salvation. Isn't it amazing to you that sitting here in the room today, it's possible that a person could be here unsaved? Just think of this. Somebody's sitting here unsaved today, and in a moment of time, he or she could make a decision to trust the Lord Jesus Christ, and that would seal that person's destiny for all eternity.

That's marvelous, isn't it? Of course, the flip side of that is that same person could resist the call of the Holy Spirit, and fail to decide for Jesus, which is a decision, and go out of the place and never hear the gospel again, die in sin. It's really momentous when you think of the importance of a decision. It makes those of us who are, I'd say, so glad that there was a time in our life when we broke at the foot of the cross and said yes to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Life's most important decision. If you don't decide for Christ, you do decide against him. He said that very clearly.

I think baptism is a great decision. You know, it's a way of confessing Christ. If on Jesus Christ you trust, speak for him, you surely must.

Though it humbles to the dust if you love him, say so. And the way that God has appointed for us to say so is in the waters of baptism. It could be that there's somebody here today, and you're saved by the grace of God.

You trusted the Savior, but you've never been baptized. And I like to remind people that you don't have to be baptized to go to heaven. That's true.

Baptism is not the door to heaven. But I also want to remind you that if you go to heaven unbaptized, that's the way you'll be throughout all eternity. Well, I don't want that, do you? I don't want to be unbaptized for all eternity.

And what I'm saying is baptism is something I can do to please the heart of Christ down here, but I won't be able to do it in heaven. No baptistry tanks in heaven. I think some Presbyterians think they might get a second chance in the river of life heaven, but I think that's stretching the scriptures a little.

A decision of loyal commitment to a local fellowship. I think there are decisions. When I was in the Navy in the Second World War, I was out in Honolulu, and I had plenty of time to think, you know.

And I thought to myself, why are you in the assemblies, Bill? Are you in the assemblies because your father's in the assemblies? Is that all it means to you? I said, that does it. And I said, I'm going to go to the Word of God and see what the Word of God says. But I went to the Word of God, and I really believe the Spirit of God directed me to Ephesians 4, where the gifts are given for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry.

And you know, that truth captivated me. I've never got over it. The gifts are given for the perfecting of the saints to the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Then I began to think of my own father. He came over fairly uneducated from Scotland, came to this country, got saved. I'm going to say fell among the brethren.

He did, and some of the brethren started to disciple him. And pretty soon, he's knowledgeable in the Word of God. And pretty soon, he's preaching the gospel.

Pretty soon, he's ministering the Word of God. He's an elder in the assembly, you know. And I thought, it works.

It works. Those gifts were given to perfect him for the work of the ministry. What a far cry that is from having one, paying one man to do it all for you, and all of that gift lying unused in the church.

Decision to be a serious student of the Word of God. It's a decision you make, and stick to it. See, I can remember distinctly when I was going through college, I thought, well, when I get to heaven, I'll know all about the Bible, see.

So, why bother down here? I really did. This is why I had it figured out. I'll be omniscient when I get to heaven.

And so, I'll leave Bible studies in. In the meantime, I'll study marketing and banking, and some of those things. And then one day, one of the preachers, John Bloor, got a hold of me, and he didn't know what I was going through.

He didn't know what was going through my mind, but he started ministering to me on Ephesians chapter 2, that in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his kindness and his grace toward us through Christ Jesus. He pointed out that heaven's going to be a place of progress. You're not going to know everything in heaven.

You're going to go on learning throughout all eternity, but what you take to heaven is what you have when you leave here. In other words, your initial investment in heaven will be what you learn about the Word of God down here, and it's what you learn about the Word of God down here that will determine your appreciation for the glories of heaven and the glories of the Lord Jesus. I want to tell you that Ephesians 2, 2-7 made me a serious Bible student.

Really did. Just that verse, I just said, that's it. This is the book of God, and I want to become proficient in the English Bible.

It's a decision you make. Decision to be a person of prayer. How do you do that? Well, it's not easy.

It's not easy, but you can have a prayer list, you know. There is such a thing as a prayer list, and as needs come up, you write them down there, and you go over that. It keeps your mind from wandering, and then we talked last night to young people about a decision of total commitment of one's life to the Lord for whatever he might want you to do.

It's a decision. A lot of people are saved, but they're still living according to their own blueprint. You can do that.

Did they ever ask the Lord, Lord, I want to do what you want me to do. I don't care what it is. You tell me what you want me to do.

That's what I want to do. I probably have quoted this here before, but it's been a great signpost in my life. I want my life so cleared of self that my dear Lord may come and set up his own furnishings and make my heart his home, and since I know what this requires, each morning while it's still, I slip into that secret place and leave with him my will.

He always takes it graciously, presenting me with his. I'm ready then to start the day in any task there is, and this is how my Lord controls my interests, my ills, because we meet that break of day for an exchange of wills. I want to tell you, I was on my knees this morning and met the Lord in the secret place for an exchange of wills.

I said to him, Lord, here's my will for the next 24 hours. Will you give me your will? I'm just a simple believer, and I do that every day of my life. Marriage is one of the great decisions of life, of course, and really has to be made in dependence upon the Lord.

A decision to be a good steward of money, a decision to memorize scripture. I wonder if the Spirit of God is speaking to somebody here today, and you have a decision to make today. Maybe there are some young people here today, and they've never decided for Christ.

You know what it means? It means you'd rather go to hell with your friends, with your unsaved friends. One of the reasons that it took me so long to get saved was I thought about the young people, my friends in high school, and I curdled when I thought of going back and telling them that I had trusted Christ. I couldn't name one of them to you today.

I couldn't name one of those young people to you today. They're part of my life. God is still there.

God is still there. That's what God thinks about me that counts, not what my unsaved friends thought about me. That's a great hurdle to get over.

There's somebody here today, and you're in the valley of decision, and you're hesitating because of what people will think. Listen, you've got to love the praise of God more than the praise of men in order to be saved. Life is so uncertain, and to die without Christ is to be lost eternally.

Do you realize how serious this really is? And not only that, but I really believe the coming of Christ is so near, so very, very near. It'd be wonderful if he just came today, but if a person is unsaved, he'd be left behind. Mother and father go, left behind, left behind to endure the sufferings of the tribulation period.

Somebody may be saying, someday. God says today. Now is the accepted time.

Behold, now is the day of salvation. Someday, you say, I will seek the Lord. Someday, I will make my choice.

Someday, someday, I will heed his word and answer the Spirit's voice. Choose now, just now, for the Lord is here, and angels your answer wait. Choose now, just now, while the call is clear.

Tomorrow may be too late. That's how we pray. And as we pray, just as we bow our heads in prayer, I'd like to say, if there's anyone here, and God is speaking to you, you're not saved, you know you're not saved, and you know you have a decision to make.

Now's the time to do it. There, as you sit there quietly before the Lord, just imagine it. You can say, yes, Lord Jesus, I'm a sinner.

I can't save myself, but I believe you've died for me. The best way I know how, I accept you as my Lord and Savior. Just think, say those words from your heart to the Lord.

Make that decision. It determines your whole eternity. We'd invite you to do it, and if we can help you, feel free to talk to us after the meeting.

We'd love to talk to you. If you do trust Christ, then set him openly before others. Tell somebody, I trusted Christ today.

Father, we just thank you for your word. We think about how the hosts of heaven hang on the decisions of men and women, young men and young women, boys and girls today. Think of how angels must marvel when they think of this marvelous provision that has been made for man's salvation, and how some refuse the offer of God, refuse the invitation to come without money and without price.

How are you afraid today that any unsaved in our midst might really come to the Savior today, now, before it is too late? And then the rest of us, we have decisions to make in life all the time, whether to resist temptation, whether to go on for the Lord, whether to pour out our lives in devoted service to him. Help us, Lord. Give us grace always to do the thing that pleases you.

Help us to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. We ask it of the Savior's worthy and precious name. Amen.

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