

TITLE: PRESERVING THE PEACE

TEXT: Joshua 24

TOPIC: Choosing Your Future

TARGET: To remind students of the need to persist in their obedience to God through both good times and bad.

TOOLS: Binoculars and tape and for the line to be used in the Approach.



TEAM TIME

(20-25 minutes in small groups)

Each time our youth group comes together, we almost always allow time for the “families” (small groups/teams) to spend a few minutes together to build team spirit and prepare for this study and for future activities together. Here is a suggested guide:

1. ROLL CALL

Take attendance! This does serve a purpose whether you use this for contest points or not. It lets all students know that they are needed and their attendance is noted. Some students truly believe that if they are absent no one would even notice. But when you take roll, you notice. Also, this gives you an opportunity to allow guests to sign up along with everyone else, so they don't feel singled out. Ask students to give their address and other needed information so you can send them information on youth group activities.

2. PREPARATION FOR FUTURE TEAM ACTIVITIES

If your team is planning any special team activities, this is a good time to make plans, and make sure that everyone knows the details. It is also a great time to make announcements and answer questions about upcoming youth group activities.

3. BIBLE QUIZ PREPARATION

We make Bible Quiz a special part of this event to reinforce the Bible Quiz that is taking place on Sunday mornings between guys and girls. The all-youth nature of this midweek youth meeting allows teams to compete with each other. The Bible Quiz questions will be taken from this current study. (See Leader's Manual).

4. WORSHIP PREPARATION

If there is a particular aspect of the large group time that requires team preparation, this may be done during this team time. In this session, we recommend that you lead the group to review the passage for this study. Then lead the group in prayer and share time. Ask: Have you ever heard the last words of a dying man? (Ask students for feedback.)



BIBLE QUIZ

(8 minutes in large group)

See Bible Quiz questions in the Leader's Manual. Remember to hype this event with exciting introductory theme music, with team cheering, giving the contestants back rubs, etc.!



PRAISE

(10 minutes in large group)

If you have a musical praise team, let them lead in a time of praise. Focus on songs which encourage persistence in our obedience to God through both good times and bad. Some examples: "Nails In Your Hands;" "Your Love Oh Lord;" "Shout to the Lord;" "Light the Fire."



FEATURE

(5 minutes in large group)

Idea: Do the following activity which illustrates the concept of patience and perseverance. Draw or tape a line on the floor about 8 feet in length. Ask three students to "walk the line." Then ask the three students to walk the line looking through the large end of binoculars. This is more difficult. But explain that if one does this often, it becomes somewhat easier. Let's see what Joshua has to say about consistency through good and bad times!



MESSAGE

(20 minutes in large group)

PRESERVING THE PEACE

Joshua 24

Explanation

Our study today takes up 25 years after the fall of Jericho. For a quarter century Joshua has led Israel to victory. He was a man of God, valorous, honorable...and God crowned him with success just as He had promised (*Joshua 1:8*).

Now Joshua prepares to tell the people goodbye. *Joshua 23:14* indicates that he knew that he was about to die. These were to be his last words. When the dying speak, it is wise to listen. Death has a way of bringing perspective and clarity to life. Joshua called the people together for his goodbye address. He gave sound advice.

I. REVIEW PAST CONQUEST *Joshua 24:1-13*

A. Credit to God

Joshua 24:1-13

Explanation

"And I..." In the first 13 verses, "I" is mentioned 17 times. Each time the reference is to God. Joshua poignantly reminded Israel that the credit for their success belonged to God alone! Joshua knew the source of his own power was in God! (*See Joshua 10:42*). In *Joshua 12:7-24*, the cities which were taken from the enemy are listed.

Illustration

When you are at the end of your life, what do you hope to be able to look back and see? Wouldn't it be great to be able to look back upon your life and count the victories that Joshua could? Imagine Joshua pointing to the large military map on his office wall where little pins dotted the map to identify the victories which God gave to Israel! "Let's see, who did we take on that day?" How gratifying that must have been!

Application

Imagine! Life certainly was not dull for Israel! God intended for the Israelite people to be conquer-

ors! He intends the same for us! He wants us to consider life a grand adventure of conquest and victory in the name of our God!

B. Contribution of Israel *Joshua 24:4,7,11*

Explanation

"And they..." And what credit belonged to the Israelites in all of that victory? Joshua calls to their attention that they did make some contributions...er, of a sort:

In verse 7 he reminds them that they cried at the Red Sea, and later they wandered around in the wilderness for 40 years after rejecting God's divine plan! Wow! What a contribution! Not.

In verse 11, Israel crossed the Jordan! Big deal. They did little but follow God's commands; sometimes they didn't even do that!

Application

In our flesh we are able to nothing of any lasting or eternal value. The only things that last are things that have the touch of God upon them! If we want a life of lasting worth, we'd better be sure that our daily walk is within the plan of God for our lives!

C. Clincher *Joshua 24:12-13*

Explanation

"...not with your sword and bow. I gave you...land...cities...vineyards..." Joshua left no doubt about who was responsible for Israel's success—God alone. Joshua reminds them that it was not by their might (*Zech. 4:6*). Nothing Israel attained was really earned or deserved by them (*2 Tim. 1:9*).

Application

Nothing we have...our life, our talents, our efforts, our salvation...nothing...has been earned. It came to us by the grace of God. But God made a promise, a covenant. And He always keeps His part (*Joshua 1:17*). God is completely trustworthy and consistent to stand by His obligations to His people. God keeps His word!

II. RESTATE PERMANENT CONDITION

Joshua 24:14

A. Covenant

Joshua 24:14

Explanation

"Fear and serve the Lord." Here is the heart of Joshua's message to Israel: "keep on loving and serving God!" This is not a new commandment. It is the same one they had always known. The Israelites were to endure to the end (*See Matt. 10:22, 24:13*).

Application

What are we to do? Our job as believers is simple...trust and obey! God wants us to decide EARLY what our values will be, before situations arise to test us...either war or luxury! Of course, this is easier said than done, isn't it? Sometimes it seems that this command may be simple, but it isn't easy! (What Christ did was "simple" too, but it certainly was not easy. There is no such thing as "cheap grace".) To turn our lives over to the control of a God whom we cannot see or control or manipulate to suit ourselves is not easy!!

B. Caliber

Joshua 24:14

Explanation

"in sincerity and truth" Not only "what", but "how" is covered by Joshua! James 1:8 speaks of the peril of being "double-minded". Sincerity is being "single-minded" about Christ! We are to be focused upon eternal priorities! The only investment that pays eternal dividends is Christ!

Illustration

It is possible to be sincere...and wrong! Sincerity without truth is very dangerous. Hitler, apparently, was sincere. Jim Jones' followers were sincere! But they died, sincerely wrong!

Application

What do you believe? Whom do you serve? Do you stake your eternal destiny on hearsay? Be assured that God is not afraid of honest inquiries. We are to be seekers (*See Hebrews 11:6*). The greatest enemy of faith is not ignorance but apathy, the unwillingness even to search for truth!

C. Caution

Joshua 24:14

Explanation

"Put away false gods..." After all of their victories, Israel still clung to gods of the past! In the Promised Land they enjoyed the blessings of God, yet were still packing vestiges of spiritual Egypt! One would think that they would have left these old idols in the dust of Egypt, yet they held on!

Application

Isn't that just like us! We have seen and experienced new life in Christ, yet we hold on to old relics from the past! Are you still placing your trust in old gods? Do you still trust in money, looks, intelligence, etc? Do you still carry the excess baggage of an old life from Egypt? Do you still have your toe in Egypt? Perhaps you still have the carry-over of old habits, old relationships, old hangouts, old tastes, old vocabulary. Joshua is reminding us to get rid of them. They only slow down our progress to the Promised Land! Like roots of cancer deep within us, they come back, and they can kill our joy in Christ! If only we could see from God's perspective how much wasted time and worries and effort we have expended in placing our trust in such false gods!

III. RENEW PERSONAL COMMITMENT

Joshua 24:15

A. Choice

Joshua 24:15

Explanation

"If evil to serve the Lord, choose..." We have been given absolute control over just one thing--the right to choose or reject God's love. God has guaranteed that He will never force His way into your life. Revelation 3:20 presents Jesus as one who knocks on the door of your heart! You alone decide!

Application

God created us for fellowship. He knows that this alone will satisfy our innermost longings. As the Inventor, He knows how to operate the human life to get the fullest potential. But God has limited Himself in the thing that matters most--He will not enter our hearts against our will.

B. Commitment

Joshua 24:15

Explanation

"...this day whom you will serve!" There is a catch to this, though. The catch is, you MUST choose...and you have only one lifetime to do it! You have no choice about WHETHER you will make this decision. You may say, "Hey, I have decided not to choose!" But God says, "*He who is not for me is against me!*" (Matt. 12:30).

Illustration

In 1980, Mt. St. Helens erupted. Five miles away, a man by the name of Harry Truman refused to leave his house, vowing to stay there and wait it out, scoffing at suggestions that he was in mortal danger. Truman denied reality, and later died as volcano lava and ash covered his home.

Application

Do you deny reality? Are you pre-occupied with other things, with your valuables, etc? Interestingly, Joshua spoke to long-time followers, who had experienced the blessings of God. Why would he ask them for commitment? Because they were in different circumstances than they were twenty five years before. Then they were going into battle, victory lay far in the distance. Now, victory was a common experience, the new had worn off, the blessings were taken for granted, there was much comfort in the land. The people were experiencing the "crisis of halfway success". It is much more difficult to stick with a project when it is halfway completed! It seems harder to "stick tuit"! The discipline required remains constant, but the return seems to diminish. There sometimes creeps in an imperceptible decline in discipline, a decreasing desire, drive, zeal, initiative, and an increasing laziness, delay, and laxness in meeting obligations. There is a tendency to rest on one's laurels, live off of the past, rest in Zion! But it is a false security!

Are you living off of past spiritual victories and conquests already "under your belt"? Is there yet still-unclaimed territory in your life which is in enemy hands? Do you have enemies close to your spiritual jugular which you have only held at bay, but not completely defeated? Perhaps now is the time to take stock and recommit your future to God!

C. Conflict

Joshua 24:15

Explanation

"..whether gods your fathers served or gods of the Amorites..." The Hebrews had unwittingly placed themselves between two temptations--one old and one new. The old temptations were the idols of the past, from Egypt. The new temptations were the idols of the peoples of Canaan.

Application

We are always somewhere between temptations! Victories always seem to be followed by new temptations, don't they!

D. Consistency

Joshua 24:15

Explanation

"But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" Joshua made a bold and final statement concerning his unwavering faith in God. He would not be moved. He made this statement in public. Those kind are harder to break than vows made in private, aren't they!

Illustration

Do you wake up each day and decide again whether to serve God or yourself, or has your mind been made up?

Application

We could learn from Joshua's example. He had made up his mind! Joshua decided long before not to hold onto a right to veto God's decisions for his life. In fact, he had decided that God's command was enough for him, and there would be no voting at all.



CLOSE

(3 minutes in large group)

Application

Real freedom never comes to those who have to decide again and again who will run their life! Real freedom is a once-for-all decision to serve God, and to follow His directions to the letter, without voting! Where are you? Have you made your decision? Are you in the "Promised Land" (saved) but you have grown lazy and self-satisfied? You need to renew your covenant with the Lord! Have you never made the discovery of a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ? If you want to, you can renounce all other gods, all other priorities, and place Jesus Christ at the alter of your life as your only Savior and Lord right now! Choose today whom you will serve! Choose publicly, for all to see! Then watch God bless you now, just as He blessed Israel then.

The message of the book of Joshua really is summed up in Joshua 23:14, in which God says, "You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed." Wow. God is faithful, and He will keep His promise to us. That is good news. Now, the question is, "Will you keep your promises to Him?" *Allow time for meditation, reflection, or even an altar call.*