

Salvation of the Family (2006)

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Joshua

24:14 Now you must fear the Lord and serve him in faithfulness and truth. Throw away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Instead, serve the Lord.

24:15 If you think it's the wrong thing for you to serve the Lord, then choose for yourselves today whom you will serve—the gods whom your ancestors served on the other side of the Euphrates River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose territories you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

24:23 Joshua said, "Therefore abandon the foreign gods that are among you, and turn your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel."

24:24 The people replied, "We will serve the Lord our God and obey his voice."

Acts

16:31 They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you and your family will be saved."

16:32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and everyone in his home.

16:33 At that hour of the night, he took them and washed their wounds. Then he and his entire family were baptized immediately.

16:34 He brought Paul and Silas upstairs into his house and set food before them. He was thrilled, as was his household, to believe in God.

[International Standard Version]

I already talked about this last Tuesday at Kichijouji. I heard that one brother who preaches in our meetings and conveys the Word of the Lord said that he does not care if his children marry to non-believers. It is not a problem at all because they will be his family and the salvation of family members is promised. He added that the Bible is too strict.

My heart was truly broken when I heard what he said. Your family will not be saved automatically. The Lord God has no grandchildren. He only has children. Therefore, even if parents are saved, it does not mean that their children are automatically saved too.

Adam and Eve must have prayed very hard for their children. Initially, they expected that their first son, Cain would be their saviour. However, eventually, he degenerated. He concealed himself from the presence of the Lord God and turned away from the Lord as it is written in the Bible. It is not written that he repented and returned to his home. Adam and Eve must have worried so much about their son.

Isaac and Rebekah must have unceasingly prayed for their first son, Esau. However, his life also degenerated. There is nowhere in the Bible written that he was recovered. For three and a half years, Judas lived with Jesus; he received the love of Jesus and kept hearing His word all the time, but he still could not be saved. I believe that Cain, Esau, and Judas regretted what they did indeed. They must have felt apologetic for what they did. However, they did not repent, which was tragic for them.

If Judas had come to Jesus while He was nailed to the cross and said, "Jesus, I am so sorry. I have been a horrible liar to you for these three and half years. I was a swindler. I spent the money offered to you for my own benefit" and so on, how would Jesus have responded to him? He would have said the same thing He said to the other thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Reflection is not enough. Judas returned the money he received and admitted that he had made a terrible mistake when he betrayed the one who had no sin. But, that was all. This is not repentance. Indeed, the salvation of the family is unthinkable important. Certainly, the Bible might look too strict to follow for some people. But, this is equivalent to saying that Jesus is too strict. However, as we all know, Jesus is by Himself the revelation of the love of God. The Bible, which consists of His word is also by itself the revelation of the love of God. Paul wrote in his epistle:

2 Corinthians

6:14 Stop becoming unevenly yoked with unbelievers. What partnership can righteousness have with lawlessness? What fellowship can light have with darkness?

6:15 What harmony exists between the Messiah and Beliar, or what do a believer and an unbeliever have in common?

6:16 What agreement can a temple of God make with idols? For we are the temple of the living God, just as God said: "I will live and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

6:17 Therefore, "Get away from them and separate yourselves from them," declares the Lord, "and don't touch anything unclean. Then I will welcome you."

6:18 I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters,” declares the Lord Almighty.

These are severe words indeed. However, they are the expression of the love of God. Today, before this meeting began, I had a little chat with sister Tomie. She met with a sister yesterday who was considering divorce. This sister said that it was her fault—she actually chose to marry an unbeliever. Their marriage failed in a short time. Isn't it a tragedy? Tomie suggested to this sister that she should apologize to her husband if she truly felt that way.

The salvation of the family is truly important. The word "family," which appears in the Bible does not necessarily refer to those who have a blood tie. In those days, it included all those who lived together and all intimate friends. There were slaves who were members of families in the early churches. In those days, slaves were properties that belonged to their masters. In that sense, they were families of their masters. They must have been so surprised when they saw that their masters had changed; that is to say, they suddenly began to act differently to them and instead of commanding them to do this and do that, they asked them, "Hey, how are you doing today?"

Many people were saved this way. Why don't we care about all the people we know as if they were a part of our families just for one time? For example, our old classmates. This may make us feel as brother Yutaka mentioned before this sermon that we have been living in a horribly wrong way; it has been a life without true prayers.

Certainly, we all pray. However, many of us stop praying when we feel that there is no answer from the Lord, don't we? Nothing is more important than being persistent in prayer, is it? The words "home" and "family" appear very often in the Bible.

Luke
8:39 "Go home..."

Go back to where you came from...

Luke
8:39 "...and tell what God has done for you.' So the man left and kept proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him."

John
1:41 "The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and say to him, 'We have found the Anointed One!' (which is translated "Messiah").
1:42 He led Simon to Jesus."

I believe that this was the desire Andrew had at the end of his life; he wanted to lead Simon to Jesus.

John
4:53 "Then the father realized that this was the very hour when Jesus had told him, 'Your son will live.' So he himself believed, along with his whole family."

Acts
16:15 "When she and her family were baptized, she urged us, 'If you are convinced that I am a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my home.' And she continued to insist that we do so."

I would prefer that you hold a home meeting than simply let people come and stay at your home. Then, I would bring all my friends to that meeting. Please think about it. There is one absolutely remarkable sentence in the verses brother Yutaka read at the beginning.

Acts
16:31 "They answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you and your family will be saved.'"

Of course, they are not saved automatically.

Acts
16:32 "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and everyone in his home.
16:33 At that hour of the night, he took them and washed their wounds. Then he and his entire family were baptized immediately.
16:34 He brought Paul and Silas upstairs into his house and set food before them. He was thrilled, as was his household, to believe in God."

Let us continue to pray until all our families, all our acquaintances come to believe in the Lord. It is also written:

Luke
19:9 "Then Jesus told him, 'Today salvation has come to this home, because this man is also a descendant of Abraham,
19:10 and the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.'"

Paul wrote in his epistle to the Romans:

Romans
16:5 "Greet also the church in their house."

After all, the salvation of all people in our homes or houses is the responsibility imposed on us.

We can find the determination of Joshua in the verses we read at the beginning of this sermon: “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). When people come to believe in the Lord, they begin to hope to live for Him, for they were saved to serve Him. Reading this confession of Joshua helps us to vividly imagine the history of the people of Israel. About four thousand years ago, the living true God revealed Himself to a man named Abraham. He lived in the land which is called Iraq today. He was an Iraqi in that sense.

In the Acts of the Apostle, in his confession, Stephen summarized the history of Israel very well in one simple sentence. It is in chapter 7, verse 2, “The glorious God appeared to Abraham.” This changed Abraham’s life completely. The God of glory, who is also known as our Father of glory revealed Himself to Abraham. And when Abraham followed this Lord, he was led to Canaan, the land that is called Israel today. Israel is the land promised to the Jewish people since four thousand years ago.

Nowadays, people of many countries are attempting to dominate this entire area after exterminating all the people of Israel. However, as it is promised by the Lord, this land is destined to belong to the Jews.

Abraham entered this land four thousand years ago. However, afterward, his descendants had to leave this land and could not return for about 430 years. First, Joseph was sold to Egypt as a slave. Later on, his father, Jacob and all his brothers were forced to travel to Egypt where they too were enslaved after a while. However, the Lord sent Moses and let him rescue the people of Israel from slavery.

This salvation by the Lord through the hands of Moses was the intervention of the Lord to fulfill the destiny of the people of Israel. It was a miracle He performed too. Afterward, the Lord supported the people of Israel in the wilderness for 40 years before He led them to the Promised Land of Canaan—again through the hands of Joshua.

This incident occurred in Israel only once throughout the history of human beings. The history of Israel is a series of continuing miracles. Israelites were the only people in this world who knew the living God. This living God revealed Himself first to Abraham. Afterward, his descendants turned to idol worship and served gods other than the living God. Although the people of Israel knew this living God very well from their own experiences, their hearts were always in danger of becoming insensitive and indifferent to the work of this true Lord.

When Joshua confessed, “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord,” he was as old as 100 years old. However, the heart of Joshua was filled with deep affection and respect to the Lord. It was for this reason that Joshua, right before his death, warned the people of Israel and encouraged them to stay loyal to this only living God. Let us look at what Joshua said to the people of Israel:

Joshua

24:14 “Now you must fear the Lord and serve him in faithfulness and truth. Throw away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Instead, serve the Lord.

24:15 ...then choose for yourselves today whom you will serve. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Why did Joshua confess this way? It was because he understood the Lord from his own experience. Because of this, he loved the Lord, he wished to live for the Lord and his desperate desire was to understand the Lord better. Joshua was a man who was truly blessed, for he came to know the Lord. Joshua had an intimate fellowship with Moses. Moses was called a man of God, the servant of God. It can be seen from what the Bible says about him, which is that the Lord, “would speak to Moses face to face just as a man speaks with his friend” (Exodus 33:11)

When the Lord gave the law to Moses after the 40 days and 40 nights on Mount Sinai, Joshua was there too. This meant that Joshua witnessed the living Lord right in front of his eyes. This made it possible for him to be used as an instrument of the Lord; he fought against the enemies of the Lord since he was very young and defeated them as described in the Scriptures.

We do not have time to read it today, but this battle of Joshua against the Amalekites is described in detail in chapter 33 of Exodus. Joshua was also one of twelve scouts sent to Canaan. This time, he trusted the promise of the Lord, which was invisible to him, instead of relying on what he actually saw there. Because of this, the people of Israel threw stones at Joshua. He also was a man who refused any kind of compromise. Let us read the commandment Joshua received from the Lord:

Deuteronomy

31:23 “Be strong and courageous, because you’ll bring the Israelites to the land that I promised to them by an oath.”

Joshua

1:9 “I’ve commanded you, haven’t I? Be strong and

courageous. Don't be fearful or discouraged, because the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Joshua witnessed all the promises of the Lord being fulfilled in his life. He experienced the miracle of crossing the Jordan river with the people of Israel following the command of the Lord. According to the command of the Lord, Joshua took control of the fort of Jericho. What was that Joshua experienced? He came to know the true living God. When we rely on the Lord, He answers us and there is nothing impossible for Him; this was the conviction that he obtained. For this very reason, he confessed, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." This was a wonderful testimony, wasn't it?

Joshua

23:3 "You have seen everything that the Lord your God has done to all of these nations on your behalf, because it has been the Lord your God who has been fighting on your behalf."

Through these words, Joshua testified that the Lord was the one who performed the miracles.

Joshua

23:14 "You know with all your hearts and souls that not a single word of all of the good things that the Lord your God spoke about you has failed to happen. Everything has been fulfilled about you—not one of them has failed."

Joshua never sought his own honor, instead, he sincerely wished the name of the Lord to be praised. The desire of Joshua was that the people of Israel serve no one but the Lord with sincere and honest hearts.

Joshua

22:5 "Only be very careful to keep the commands and the Law that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you—that is, to love the Lord your God, to follow in all of his ways, to keep his commands, to stay close to him, and to serve him with all your heart and soul."

23:11 "So be very diligent to love the Lord your God."

What did Joshua testify about? The content of his testimony is all about the Lord. It was for this reason that he said, "as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Even if all the people of Israel turned their backs to the Lord, Joshua alone would never have stopped obeying the living true God.

He must have reaffirmed his determination again and again; he must have done so a number of times. "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." He had determined to do so many years ago; "I will serve the Lord." But, this time, he renewed his desperate desire to understand the Lord better. Even after he reached 100 years old, he had nothing to serve other than the Lord. He did not look away to the left and right but his eyes were always fixed straight on the Lord.

What kind of change did this determination of Joshua bring to the people of Israel? The people of Israel were deeply impressed by Joshua's determination. They realized that Joshua was right and that they too belonged to the mighty Lord.

There, they confessed that they too had decided to serve the Lord and that they desperately wanted to do so. It was not a determination that was made in a fit of passion. It was the determination that arose from their own experiences. It is clearly expressed in the Bible that the determination of the people of Israel was not temporal.

Joshua

24:31 "Israel served the Lord for the entire lifetimes of Joshua and of the officials who outlived Joshua, that is, the ones who had personally known everything that the Lord had done for Israel."

We will serve the Lord. Not only did this determination become the purpose and desire throughout the life of Joshua, this should become our determination too, shouldn't it? We certainly used to serve idols before we believed in Jesus. During these times, Jesus was not placed at the center of our lives. Paul wrote to the brothers and sisters in Corinth in his first epistle to them. Let us look at chapter 12, verse 2:

1 Corinthians

12:2 "You know that when you were unbelievers, you were enticed and led astray to worship idols that couldn't even speak."

Galatians

4:8 "However, in the past, when you did not know God, you were slaves to things that are not really gods at all."

We too used to serve idols. Now, through the Word of the Lord, we have seen how our lives have been meaningless and hopeless. We were losers in life and useless human beings. However, when we were led to Jesus, we were shown that He is the one who forgives our sins, the one who gives us true joy and provides us with true peace of mind.

And when we know Jesus from our own experiences, we are compelled to testify how much we hope to serve the Lord. Furthermore, instead of pursuing our own desires, we now hope to live for Jesus, for we realized that there is no satisfaction when we place ourselves at the center of everything. Contrarily, there is true freedom in a life that is dedicated to Jesus and true joy can also be found.

It is written in the confession of Joshua, not just "I will serve the Lord," but my household, my family and all my acquaintances will serve the Lord. Our desire should be, that not only we will serve the Lord, but that all our family members and all the people we know meet the Lord and serve Him together. We serve the Lord because the Lord demands us to do so and it is His commandment too. Let us open chapter 10 of the book of Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy

10:12 "Now Israel, what does the Lord your God desire from you? Only this: fear him, walk in all his ways, love him, serve him with all your heart and in all your life,

10:13 and observe his commands and statutes that I'm commanding you today for your own good."

We all are faced with one choice once in our lifetime; it is a choice of whether we serve the true Lord or not. And it is extremely important for us to make the right choice. Of course, an individual is free to decide whether he or she will serve the Lord or not. The Lord never forces us to serve Him. Jesus repeatedly asked, "Do you want to follow me...?" If you don't want to, it is just fine.

Do we understand what the determination to serve the Lord means to us? We can find many real-life examples of the people who made this same determination in the Bible. It was not only Joshua and his family, but all the households in Israel made such decisions. Moses was one of such people who made this determination. It is explained in the Bible:

Hebrews

11:25 "...he preferred being mistreated with God's people to enjoying the pleasures of sin for a short time."

We need to contemplate well before we decide the way to proceed. What should I do? Moses contemplated for a long time and chose to live a life filled with pain.

Hebrews

11:26 "He thought that being insulted for the sake of the Messiah was of greater value than the

treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward."

His eyes were fixed on his Lord and he never looked away. Moses was greatly used by the Lord and he did not regret his choice. Ruth was a so-called Gentile, who did not belong to the people of Israel, but she was the one who made the same determination as others as described in these verses of the Bible:

Ruth

1:15 "Naomi told Ruth, 'Look, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and to her gods. Follow your sister-in-law!'

1:16 But Ruth answered, 'Stop urging me to abandon you and to turn back from following you. Because wherever you go, I'll go. Wherever you live, I'll live. Your people will be my people, and your God, my God.'"

This was a conversation between a widow and her mother-in-law. Isn't it amazing? After all, she thought, "I want to serve the living God. I can never be separated from Him no matter what happens." Another Gentile, a commander called Naaman, who did not belong to the people of Israel also made the same determination:

2 Kings

5:17 because your servant...

He, did not say, "I, the General, will," but,

5:17 "...your servant will no longer offer any burnt offering or sacrifice to any other god but the Lord.

This is a wonderful confession. Asaph, one of the authors of the Psalms also made the same determination.

Psalms

73:25 "Whom do I have in heaven but you? I desire nothing on this earth."

All those who experience the Lord personally come to desire sincerely to serve the Lord and live for Him. Those who have not experienced the Lord personally may also wish momentarily to serve the Lord, but they do not put it into practice. The young rich man who appears in the gospel according to Mark is a real-life example of such a person. We can find what he did in chapter 10, verses 21 to 22:

Mark

10:21 "Jesus looked at him and loved him. Then he told him (loving him wholeheartedly), 'You're missing one thing. Go and sell everything you own, give the money to the destitute, and you will have

treasure in heaven. Then come back and follow me.'

10:22 Shocked at this statement, the man went away sad, because he had many possessions."

I believe that Jesus must have felt much sadder than this man. Furthermore, we can see from chapter 6 of the gospel according to John that many of the disciples who followed Jesus left Him. Jesus asked the disciples who were with Him:

John

6:67 "You don't want to leave, too, do you?"

Peter answered this question:

John

6:68 "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life.

6:69 Besides, we have believed and remain convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

We too are convinced of this. This gathering today is also an invitation to the same determination, isn't it? It is a calling toward serving the Lord Jesus. Moses sent such an invitation to the people of Israel in the era of the Old Testament.

Exodus

32:26 "He stood in the gate of the camp and called out: "Whoever is for the Lord come over to me."

Those who came over to Moses became servants of the Lord and they received abundant blessings. The prophet Elijah once called people to such a determination as well:

1 Kings

18:21 "Where Elijah approached all the people and asked them, 'How long will you keep hesitating between both sides? If the Lord is God, go after him. If Baal, go after him.'"

Pilate also asked his people to choose in a similar way. It can be found in this verse from the New Testament;

Matthew

27:17 "So when the people had gathered, Pilate asked them, 'Which man do you want me to release for you—Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?'"

In Deuteronomy, Moses called to the people of Israel:

Deuteronomy

30:19 "I call heaven and earth to testify against you today! I've set life and death before you today: both

blessings and curses. Choose life."

This is another important verse.

1 Chronicles

28:9 "Now as for you, get to know the God of your father(the Lord God). Serve him with a sound heart and a devoted soul, because the Lord is searching every heart, every plan and thought. He will be found by you, assuming you are seeking him, but if you abandon him, he will abandon you forever."

Let us sincerely continue to pray for our families, relatives and all the people we know more than ever.

End