

Joshua: His Experience, Testimony and Determination

September 23rd, 2014, Kichijouji Bible Study
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2014年9月23日、吉祥寺学び会
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Joshua

23:14 "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."

These verses we just read help us to overview the brief history of the people of Israel. Four thousand years ago, the true living God revealed himself in front of the man called Abraham. This incident is described in this simple sentences in Acts 7:2; "The glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham."

Abraham obeyed the Lord God and he was led to the promised land of Canaan, the land which is called Israel today. Israel is the land promised to Jews. Today, Arabs are attempting to exterminate all Israelis and rule this whole land. However, according to the promise of the Lord God, this land is destined to be owned by Jews.

Israel is the only one nation that is promised to remain forever. We don't know what will happen to Japan in the future. Or to Germany, either. However, Israel is destined to be the center of the whole world, although it is beyond our imagination. It may sound like a joke from humans' perspective. But, it is absolutely true, because the Bible says so.

Abraham entered this land 4,000 years ago. However, his descendants were forced to leave this land later for a long time. It began when a man called Joseph was sold to Egypt. After a while, his father Jacob and all his brothers descended to Egypt.

As they lived in Egypt for years, they had to go through terrible ordeals. They were made into

slaves. However, the gracious Lord sent Moses to liberate the people of Israel from this slavery and rescued them.

This liberation by the Lord through Moses was a great blessing for the people of Israel. It was a miracle, too. Then, the Lord nourished the people of Israel in the wilderness, not for four days, not for 40 days, but for forty long years, after which the Lord used Joshua to lead them again to the promised land of Canaan.

This incident in Israel was the miracle that occurred only once in human history. The history of Israel is the history of miracles. The people of Israel were the only people who knew the living Lord God in this world.

This true living God revealed himself to Abraham. But, his descendents were all reduced to idol worship and served false gods other than this true Lord. Although people of Israel knew this living Lord God very well from their own experience, they were always facing the danger of getting dull and indifferent to this Lord.

Although Joshua was already as old as 100 years old, his heart was filled with a deep respect for the Lord God. As the time of his death neared, Joshua issued a warning to the people of Israel and urged them to be loyal to this only living Lord God.

Joshua said to the people of Israel, "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" (Joshua 24:14). He then commanded, "Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15.)

This exclamation expressed the experience of Joshua, the testimony of Joshua, and the new determination of Joshua. What Joshua experienced was that he could truly understand the Lord. That was exactly why he loved the Lord; he desired to live only for the Lord and serve him. His desperate desire was to understand the intention of the Lord better. In this sermon, I would like to go through these three points.

To begin with, what was it that Joshua experienced? Joshua came to understand the Lord himself. No experience is more important than this. Let us look at what Job said when he had exactly the same experience as Joshua had. Let me read some verses.

Job

42:5 I've heard you with my ears; and now I've seen you with my eyes.

42:6 As a result, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

This was the consequence of experiencing the Lord. I suppose from what Paul wrote in the following epistle, that he was led in the same manner and had the same experience:

Philippians

3:8 What is more, I continue to consider all these things to be a loss for the sake of what is far more valuable, knowing the Messiah Jesus, my Lord. It is because of him that I have experienced the loss of all those things. Indeed, I consider them rubbish in order to gain the Messiah

Joshua experienced intimate fellowship with Moses. Moses was called the man of God, the servant of God, and the most sincere servant. According to the Bible, the Lord saw Moses face to face and talked to him just like a friend talking to his friend.

When the Lord gave “the commandment” to Moses, after he spent 40 days and 40 nights on Mount Sinai, Joshua was there, which proves that Joshua himself too experienced the presence of the living true God. He served as the instrument of the Lord God since he was young. He fought the enemies of the Lord and defeated them.

To summarize the experience of Joshua in simple sentence: those who pray will win, those who pray will be used, and those who pray will be given the courage to be liberated from the fear of men. This was exactly what Joshua experienced.

Chapter 17 of Exodus describes Joshua's war against the Amalekites in detail. As described later in the Bible, Joshua was one of 12 spies who were dispatched to Canaan. During this mission, Joshua did not rely on what his eyes could see, but instead trusted the promise of the Lord, which was invisible to his eyes. For this reason, the people of Israel attempted to kill him, but Joshua refused to make any compromise. He received these commands from the Lord:

Deuteronomy

31:23 Then the Lord charged Nun's son Joshua, “Be strong and courageous, because you'll bring the Israelis to the land that I promised to them by an oath. I'll be with you.”

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.

This promise was not just given to him, but it was also written for us, too, wasn't it? The Lord is same

yesterday, today, and forever. So, we can be certain that this same thing is written for us, too.

It makes us feel blessed to believe that this promise is given to us, too. The Lord is not a liar. His is the one who keeps his words. Joshua experienced all the promises of this Lord fulfilled. Joshua and the people of Israel experienced an unbelievable miracle when they obeyed the command of the Lord, and crossed over the Jordan River.

By following the commands of the Lord, Joshua captured the fort of Jericho. What did Joshua experience? He experienced the living God. He understood that the Lord was alive and nothing was impossible for the Lord. For this very reason, Joshua was compelled to confess that “as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Now secondly, let us think about the testimony of Joshua.

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 experienced and testified that the Lord was the one who performed the miracle.

Joshua

23:14 Look here: today I'm going down the path that everyone on earth takes, and 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 desired the name of the Lord to be worshiped. Joshua only wanted the people of Israel to serve the Lord with sincere 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.

We often say this in many aspects of our life; “Be diligent.” But, this verse consists of more important words: “Be very diligent to love the Lord your God.” It

is not just “Believe in the Lord.” What was it that Joshua wanted to testify about, after all?

Joshua testified about nothing but the Lord. For this reason, Joshua said, “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Even if all other people of Israel turned their backs to the Lord, Joshua still would have obeyed the living true God.

Thirdly, we see the determination of Joshua. What was it that Joshua was newly determined to? He was determined to renew his age old determination, “I will serve the Lord.”

After all, Joshua’s desperate desire was to understand the Lord better. Even after he was over 100 years of age, there was no one other than the Lord for Joshua to serve. He did not look aside, but his eyes were always fixed on the Lord. What kind of results did this attitude of Joshua bring to the people of Israel?

The people of Israel were deeply impressed by this determined attitude of Joshua. The people of Israel realized the righteousness of Joshua and understood that they belonged to the mighty Lord God. This made them desire to serve the Lord, too. They were not just controlled by fleeting emotions, but this was determination based on their own experience. We can see clearly from the Bible that this determination of the people of Israel did not vanish with the passing of time. It is described in Joshua, chapter 24.

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.

I trust that this gathering today has to be the place to express our new determination like this. “But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” This was the determination and desire that Joshua pursued. And it needs to be our determination, too, doesn’t it?

Certainly, until we knew Jesus, many of us used to worship idols, and Jesus was nowhere in our lives. Among the many epistles Paul wrote, this letter which was sent to his brothers and sisters in Corinth deserves our attention:

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.

But now, we realized through the words of the Lord, that there was no real meaning or hope in our lives. When we were led to Jesus as total losers, as sinners, we came to understand that Jesus is the one who forgives all sins, who gives us true joy, and who gracefully provides us with true peace of mind.

We understood the Lord based on our own experience, and testified that we were determined to serve the Lord. Now, we are committed to living for Jesus instead of ourselves.

There is no true joy in the self-centered life. However, when your life is surrendered to Jesus, you will find liberation and true blessing in there. In Joshua’s confession, he mentioned that not only would he serve the Lord, but his entire household would serve the Lord, too. It should also be our sincere desire that not only we serve the Lord, but all our family members and acquaintances understand the Lord and serve the Lord all together. The Lord demands us to serve him. It is not just a request, but a commandment from the Lord.

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 will eventually stand before one important decision in life. It is the decision whether we will serve the true Lord God, or not. And it is unimaginably important for us to make the right decision. Whether we serve the Lord or not totally depends on our own personal decision.

Do we know what it is like to be determined to serve the Lord? We can find so many real-life examples in the Bible of those who made this determination. After all, the Bible tells us that, it was not only Joshua and his household, but many households in the land of Israel made the same determination. Moses was one of the men who made such determination.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 11 is very famous. It contains some important words that deserve to be contemplated and proclaimed. From humans’ perspective, Moses was a stupid man because he preferred to suffer. He was asked whether he wanted to suffer a lot, or he wanted to avoid a pain. And he basically answered, “Oh, yes, I want the sufferings.”

Hebrews

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

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.

We ought to be looking ahead to Jesus. After Moses, there was this woman who did not even belong to the people of Israel. She was a Gentile woman called Ruth.

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 Gentile woman, Ruth, encountered the true God. As a result, she could make this determination and confess as she did above. Ruth reached the same determination as Moses.

Thirdly, a man called Naaman also did not belong to the people of Israel, and he also was a Gentile. Still, he shared this determination.

2 Kings

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

It is a wonderful confession. The fourth confession comes from Asaph, the author of some of the Psalms. He was a man with the same determination.

Psalms

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

Those who experienced the Lord God in person will all have a desire to serve the Lord. Unless you personally experience the Lord, no matter how strong you wish to serve him, you will never be given a chance to put it into practice.

A fifth real-life example is this rich young man.

Mark

10:21 Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the destitute, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come back and follow me."

10:22 But when the young man heard this statement he went away sad, because he had many possessions.

Jesus must have been sadder than this man was. As described in John, chapter 6, many of the disciples who followed Jesus eventually left him. Then, Jesus asked other disciples who were still with him, "You don't want to leave, too, do you?"

Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. Besides, we have believed and remain convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

This gathering of today is also the invitation to the same determination. We are all invited to serve Jesus. Moses, too, urged people to serve the Lord. "He stood in the gate of the camp and called out: Whoever is for the Lord come over to me" (Exodus 32:26). Elijah, too, issued a similar invitation.

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" (1 Kings 18:21). Also, in the era of Jesus, Pilate called for the answer to this question;

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?"

Sin? Life? Or, death? This is the decision we are facing. I will conclude this sermon with two more verses from the Bible.

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.

1 Chronicles

28:9 Now as for you, my son Solomon, get to know the God of your father. 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.

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