

Choose – Chosen

- I. A Christian couple hung a plaque in their home inscribed with the following Bible verse: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” The text is from the Old Testament: Joshua 24:15. The plaque serves as a family motto and reminder of their focus in life.

Joshua’s motto applies to the tough times in which we live today. Christianity is under assault today. Marriage and the family are under assault today. Approximately 40% of children are raised in homes without a father. Over 70% of black children are raised without a dad in their home. These are tough times for Christianity and tough times for the family.

The Joshua story: As the Israelites approached the Promised Land, Moses sent twelve spies to scout out the territory. Upon their return all twelve spies reported the good news: “It is a land flowing with milk and honey!”

But opinion was divided about what to do next. Ten of the spies warned that the Canaanites are very strong and their cities fortified. The ten lack faith that the Lord would deliver them.

But two spies, Joshua and Caleb, dissent, claiming: “We can conquer the land, for the Lord is with us.” The people, however, put their trust in the ten. Then the Lord pronounces the judgment that the faithless people must wander in the wilderness for forty years. And they do until all the old faithless spies had died out and only Joshua and Caleb are left. The Lord tells Joshua and Caleb that they and the younger generation under 20 years of age would be able to go into the Promised Land because they were the two who had faith that the Lord would deliver them.

And so it happened. Joshua led the Israelites across the River Jordan to the Promised Land. You know the spiritual that tells this story: “Joshua fought the battle of Jericho and the walls came a-tumblin’ down.” It took Joshua and the Israelites seven years to establish a new homeland. The Lord fulfilled his promise to deliver them.

For this reason, every seven years (Deut. 31:10) the Israelites gathered to renew their covenant with the Lord. The covenant renewal ceremony took place in a natural amphitheater between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. The organic acoustics between these two mountains are much like the Red Rocks Amphitheater outside of Denver, Colorado.

Imagine the drama with the towering mountains and near perfect acoustics: All the tribes of Israel gathered in this natural amphitheater and divided into two groups for the reading of the law together with a responsive reading of its blessings and curses: From one mountain tribal elders call out the curses for disobeying the law. From the other mountain other elders call out the blessings on those who obey the law. The tribes then commitment themselves to the Lord. As written in Joshua 24:14-15: “Fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and faithfulness...and if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, **choose** this day whom you will serve...whether the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites...But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

- II. **Choose** this day whom you will serve! This call to **choose** marks this ancient covenant as a **two-sided** contract of reciprocal responsibilities and blessings. It was a pact, a deal, a commitment between the Lord and his people. The Lord does this; the people do that. Today the Lord has declared that

you are a people for his own possession (Deut 26:18). And the people are called to make a choice, a commitment. **Choose** this day whom you will serve! Today you **choose** to obey his commandments.

III. Totally different is the **one-sided** covenant of promise. Not: Today you must choose; rather today you have been **chosen**. God acts. He does it. The Lord makes it happen. He declares. Five examples of a **one-sided** covenant:

1. Noah. Gen 9:16: "When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth."
2. Abraham. Gen 12:1-3: "I will make of you a great nation...I will bless you...and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."
3. David. 2 Sam 7:13: "I will raise up your offspring after you...I will establish his kingdom...He shall build a house for my name...I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father and he shall be my son."
4. Israel. Romans 11:19-29. Especially: 11:27: "And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." 11:29: "For the gifts and the call of God are **irrevocable**." 11:32: "For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all." 11:34-35: "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?'"
5. The new covenant. The Lord alone does it without us. 1 Cor 11:25: "This cup is **the new covenant** in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

IV. What about us? What's our role? Don't we have a say?

1. But we are **slaves**. Rom 6:16b and 18: "You are **slaves** of the one you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness...having been set free from sin, have become **slaves** of righteousness."
2. And yet Gal 3:29: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, **heirs** according to promise."

Gal 4:7-9: "So through God you are **no longer a slave** but a son, and if **a son** then **an heir**. Formerly, you were in bondage...but now you have come to know God, or rather **to be known by God**..."

Phil 3:12: "...I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus **has made me his own**."

3. In baptism we are chosen. In baptism he snatches us: "**snatches** us from the jaws of the devil and makes us God's own" (Large Catechism, Baptism, IV:83. Tappert, 446; Kolb/Wengert 466). Rom 6:5: "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall **certainly** be united with him in a resurrection like his." In baptism he claims us and carries us safely to the other side. **The new covenant is a one-sided covenant**.
4. Free in Christ now because our hope, our salvation does not depend "on anything we are think, say, or do" (Smalcald III/III:36, Tappert 309). No longer slaves, now **adopted** sons and

daughters (Gal 4:4-7). Free to be his adopted children in this time and place. Free to use our heads and our hearts in the battles we face, knowing that when we cry: “Abba! Father!” the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **if children, then heirs** of God and fellow **heirs** with Christ (Rom 8:15-17), confident that baptized into his death, we shall **certainly** be united with him in his kingdom to come. **Chosen.**