

2011

"No Quitting for Old Men"

*... choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...
But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."
Joshua 24:15*

Some years ago we developed a vision statement for our church. It's *Being changed to Bring Change*.

- A radically *changed* life is what Jesus offers to any and all who will believe on Him. The change begins when you first realize you are a sinner and He is your Savior. God forgives your sin and gives you a new nature, sending His Holy Spirit to live within you. But the change doesn't stop there. God's purpose is to change you day-by-day to be more like Jesus. One day He will take you home, to Heaven - either in the Rapture of the church or when you die physically. Then, when you are face-to-face with Jesus, the change He has begun in you will be complete.
- Your changed life can *bring change* to the people you encounter. As you interact with other believers, your love for God encourages them in their own relationship with Jesus. As you interact with nonbelievers they are challenged when you share about Jesus in the context of the amazing changes He has brought into your life.

Being changed is a progressive work. God began a good work in you at the moment of your salvation and He will continue it throughout your life on earth until you are with Him in Heaven and fully, finally perfected.

Being changed, therefore, is something we have a hand in. It's something we are to cooperate with.

For example, if you get saved at an evangelistic event, the counselors will tell you that there are four basic things you'll want to do to further your relationship with Jesus: pray, read the Bible, get into a church, and share your faith.

Those are good foundational things. Then, as you read the Word of God, you encounter other things, other behaviors consistent with your new life in Jesus Christ that further His work in you.

Jesus presented three behaviors in His Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. We call them **PG&F** - Pray, Give, and Fast.

In each case He assumed we would be doing them:

- Jesus said, “when you do a charitable deed...”
- Jesus said, “when you pray...”
- Jesus said “when you fast...”

Notice that the Lord said, “when,” not if, you pray and give and fast. Yet it’s been my experience personally, and my observation corporately, that these may be the three least practiced behaviors among believers.

- Regarding “giving,” the statistics are pretty dramatic. The average Christian gives around 2% of their income to the work of the Lord. When you figure in those who tithe, who give 10%, it means that most Christians give nothing or almost nothing to the work of the Lord.
- It’s hard to give a statistical analysis of prayer, especially private prayer. Still, almost any believer will readily admit they don’t pray as much as they ought to or would like to. Generally the prayer meetings of a church are the least attended gatherings.
- Fasting has fallen on hard times. A number of contemporary Christian teachers even go so far as to say that fasting is no longer a discipline Christians ought to practice.

(We did a four-part series called PG&F this past year. I’d encourage you to go to our website and either download the transcripts or watch the videos <http://www.calvaryhanford.com/bible-studies/pgf>).

Today I want to call us to a place of commitment regarding these behaviors and to living for Christ in general. I can think of no better call to commitment than the one Joshua issued to the Israelites in chapter twenty-four of the book bearing his name. The gist of it is verse fifteen.

Joshua 24:15 ... choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Common Bible texts can be difficult to unpack because we're already so familiar with them. This statement by Joshua is certainly one of those. You probably have, or have had, this verse on a plaque or cross stitch or some other decorative item in your home. We'll have to try hard to not let our familiarity with it overshadow something new and fresh the Lord wants to share with us from it.

Joshua was already at least ninety years old back in chapter thirteen when we read, "Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the Lord said to him: "You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed" (verse 1).

When he issued his famous challenge Joshua was pretty close to dying. In fact, right after he finished speaking we read in verse twenty-nine of chapter twenty-four, "Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, **died**, being one hundred and ten years old."

Here he was an old man about to die. My NKJV Bible even gives as the heading for this chapter, *Joshua's Farewell Address*.

Taking into consideration Joshua was "old and advanced in years" and the fact this was a farewell and that he would shortly die, I was struck by his choice of verb tense. I half expect him to say to the Israelites, "but as for me and my house, we **HAVE SERVED** the Lord." I can almost hear it in the past tense.

For sure, Joshua had served the Lord. He had had a remarkable spiritual career.

He first appears on the pages of Scripture with almost no introduction although he was obviously well known among the Israelites. As Moses was leading the Exodus from Egypt the Israelites came to Rephidim. They were attacked by the Amalekites. From the mountain top Moses prayed for the

battle with uplifted arms. When his arms tired, Aaron and Hur held them up and the Israelites had the 'upper hand' (pun intended) in the battle.

Down below Joshua was entrusted as the commander of the rag-tag Israeli forces in their very first military conflict out of Egypt. Joshua led them to victory.

We next see Joshua accompanying Moses part way up Mount Sinai at the giving of the Law. He seems to have shadowed Moses, especially at key moments. There are four passages that describe him as Moses' "assistant," his servant.

He was chosen as one of the twelve spies sent forth to survey the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb brought back a favorable report and argued for immediate entrance into the land. The other ten spies swayed the people's opinion against entering the land. Because of their unbelief the Israelites were made to wander in the desert for the next forty years. Only Moses, Joshua, and Caleb survived from the generation over twenty years of age that had refused to enter the land.

Upon Moses' death Joshua became the undisputed leader of Israel. Then his story really takes off! He led them in a miraculous crossing of the Jordan River. They took Jericho with an unusual strategy as its walls came tumbling down. With shock-and-awe military precision Joshua's forces conquered the land.

Afterwards he diplomatically but authoritatively divided the land among the Israelites tribe by tribe.

If there is a single episode that captures Joshua's faithfulness and zeal to serve the Lord it occurred during the conquest of the land when his forces were fighting the Amorites. Joshua prayed for the sun and moon to stop so he would have extra daylight to finish the task. Scripture records that this prayer was answered: The sun "delayed going down about a full day" (10:13).

Those are merely the highlights of an illustrious spiritual career. So here was Joshua, "old and advanced in years," on the verge of death, giving a

farewell address. Nevertheless he doesn't say he and his house **HAVE SERVED** the Lord. No, he says "we **WILL SERVE** the Lord."

At the time in which he might have been looking forward to retiring, or simply some R&R, he was looking ahead, looking forward, planning a completely spiritual future of continuing his service to God.

If I were giving this message a title, it would have to be *No Quitting for Old Men*.

Something God said, something He told Joshua, provides important context for Joshua's commitment. I mentioned it but it bears repeating.

Joshua 13:1 Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the Lord said to him: "You are old, advanced in years, **and there remains very much land yet to be possessed.**"

Had they accomplished much? *You bet!* But there was still "very much land yet to be possessed."

The people were looking back too much on what they'd already accomplished. The Lord and Joshua were looking ahead on what still needed to be accomplished.

Calvary Hanford has been around some twenty-five years. We've accomplished much. There is, however, still "very much land yet to be possessed."

What about you and I? Where are we looking? Are we more like Joshua? Or the Israelites?

#1 If You Are Looking Back
You're Going To Be Falling Back

At a pivotal moment in the classic film, *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett says to Ashley, "Don't look back Ashley, don't look back. It'll drag at your heart until you can't do anything but look back."

The Israelites were looking back and it dragged their hearts back - all the way back into the world and its idolatry.

Joshua challenged them to choose whom they would serve. Their response sounded good.

Joshua 24:21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the Lord!"

Joshua gave a second call to commitment.

Joshua 24:22 So Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord for yourselves, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses!"

The people sincerely wanted to serve the Lord. *So do we!* Who wouldn't want to serve such an amazing, loving, gracious God?

There was a problem, however, among the Israelites.

Joshua 24:23 "Now therefore," he said, "put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel."

Amazing! Until now you think this is a warning to them to not get involved with idols in the future. *They already were practicing idolatry.*

Why? How? First of all, we all have a propensity to be drawn away by the things of the world, by the lusts of the flesh. Second of all, in the context of Joshua's speech, I'd say it was because the people were resting, relaxing, looking back on what they'd accomplished rather than forward to what yet needed to be done.

Joshua said, "incline your heart to the Lord." The New Testament version of that is in Colossians 3:2 where you are told to "set your affection on things above" and not on the things of the earth (KJV).

A. T. Robertson writes: "The Christian is seeking Heaven and is thinking Heaven. His feet are upon the earth, but his head is with the stars. He is living like a citizen of Heaven here on earth."

Adam Clarke writes:

Love heavenly things; study them; let your hearts be entirely engrossed by them. Now, that [you] are converted to God, act in reference to heavenly things as [you] did formerly in reference to those of earth; and vice versa. This is a very good general rule: “Be as much in earnest for heavenly and eternal things, as [you] formerly were for those that are earthly and perishing.

John Wesley said, “They that are bound for Heaven must be willing to swim against the stream, and must do, not as most do, but as the best do.”

There is still much land to be possessed *and there always will be until the coming of the Lord!*

Don't look back. Not at the world and things God has delivered you from, or things desirable but evil, or even things that are lawful for you but distracting.

Don't look back, either, upon spiritual accomplishments. For sure, the Lord will reward you for them in the future, but they do not give you pause to rest or relax or retire from pressing forward.

Remember Lot's wife? As the angels were saving Lot and his wife and their daughters from Sodom and Gomorrah, she looked back and was rained on by the fire and brimstone, turning her into a solid pillar of salt. She stood there a monument to the decision of the heart to long after the things of this world even while its citizens were perishing. You see, she should have been spiritual salt to those people, but she had lost her flavor and her ability to act as a preservative.

Looking back makes you into a monument when God is calling you to remain in motion.

#2 If You're Looking Ahead
You're Going To Be Pulling Ahead

The Israelites responded favorably to Joshua's challenge.

Joshua 24:24 And the people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!"

Joshua 24:25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

Joshua 24:26 Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.

Joshua 24:27 And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God."

Joshua 24:28 So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance.

In passing I'd like to say that archaeologists have discovered Shechem and have even found a large limestone pillar they believe may have been the "stone" Joshua wrote upon.

The Israelites made a verbal commitment to turn from idols and return to God. Then Joshua noted it and recorded it.

Did they go home, bring out their idols and destroy them? I'd like to think that some did. "Love believes all things."

Before we "depart, each to our own inheritance" we ought to take a moment to make a commitment to the Lord.

Think of yourself in relation to the the three behaviors Jesus noted that were the lifestyle of His followers: praying, giving, and fasting.

With regard to **praying**, in addition to your personal prayer life we want to encourage you to join us in 2011 as we pray. Next Wednesday we'll begin *Even One*, a week dedicated to prayer. Most Saturday nights we keep *First Watch* at 6pm. Every Sunday morning the Prayer Room is open upstairs before the morning services. In addition to praying we have the communion elements set-up there. Scattered all around campus are Prayer Cards. Fill them out; turn them in. Most Wednesday's at IGNITE! we have a time set aside for corporate prayer. Send us requests and updates to prayer@calvaryhanford.com.

With regard to **giving**, I'd ask that you review how much you give to the work of the Lord. There's a lot of teaching, a lot of instruction and direction,

in the Bible about giving. Let me summarize a few principles you find in Scripture.

- Every believer is called upon by Jesus to give to His work. That should come as no surprise, really.
- Giving means your money. Serving is an act of love and obedience but no where in the Bible does it say we can substitute serving for giving. They are two separate delights.
- Giving is to be regular and systematic. It can be weekly, in the offering or the offering box. It can be monthly, or quarterly, if that's how your finances work. It can be mailed in or given online. But do it regularly and systematically.
- New Testament giving is described as being sacrificial. It should cost you something.
- Giving is to be done cheerfully, not grudgingly. God loves a cheerful giver.
- **The portion you give is left up to you.** The New Testament sets no limit, like 10%, on your giving. You're free to give as God leads. But His leading will not be less than what the Old Testament saints gave. Here's why. We're not under the law, but rather motivated by love. We are to give because of love and not because of fear of breaking the law. Having said that, it makes no sense that we would give less because of love than we would under the law.

With regard to **fasting**, I want to reemphasize that we want to fast as a congregation on the last day of each month. Once a month. You can do it more if you'd like, but let's think about doing it once a month. Be sure you're healthy and take liquids during your fast if you participate.

(Again, I'd recommend you get the transcripts from our PG&F series or watch the videos).

Let's take a few minutes as we close to reflect on what we've heard and to let the Lord speak to our hearts. This is a quiet time, a personal time - *not* a time of open, corporate prayer.

If after you've prayed you feel a need to come forward and physically memorialize a decision, then there will be men up front you can pray with.

In the private of your heart, before the Lord, ask the Lord to show you if you've been looking back - either at the world or at your own spiritual resume. If you have, repent of it.

Then let the Lord know that you **WILL SERVE** Him, in the present tense and looking ahead to 2011 and until He comes for you or for us.

