

Joshua 24:14-16 Joshua said, “Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly and faithfully. Remove the gods that your fathers served in the region across the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵But if you see no benefit in serving the LORD, then choose for yourselves today whomever you will serve—whether the gods that your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household—we will serve the LORD!”

¹⁶The people responded by saying, “Far be it from us to forsake the LORD in order to serve other gods! The LORD drove out of our presence all the peoples and the Amorites who were living in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God!”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, serving God doesn’t take much thought. We do it, each of us, every single day without even thinking about it. It’s simple. You’re doing it right now.

Luther explains: “Wherever you look for the highest good in life, that is your God.” Wherever you look for the best out of life, that has become your God. The next question is this: Who is your God? Who do you serve?

In this world there are plenty to choose from — Allah, Buddha, and other idols... Things like money, self, time, possessions, people, ideas, success, love, drugs, jobs, careers, power... We have become adept at making just about anything in our world a god. So who is your God? Who do you serve?

The Israelites in our text this morning had to deal with that question as Joshua’s time as their leader drew to a close. They, too, had a lot of false gods to choose from. While living in Egypt they were surrounded by them. They were in every house. On the night of the tenth and final plague, the Israelites plundered the Egyptians on their way out, taking many of those household gods with them.

Now, as Joshua was about to die, he made one final plea to his people, making it clear who they should serve — the true God. **Fear the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly and faithfully. Remove the gods that your fathers served in the region across the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.**

And he continued, **But if you see no benefit in serving the Lord...** How could that be?? It seems Joshua had been hearing from the people echoes

of the same grumbling that Moses constantly heard. “What benefit have we gained by following the Lord out into this desert — to die?” And now, “Who will fight for us now that Joshua is leaving us?” Even after not taking, but receiving from God’s hand the promised land, still in difficult times they struggled and even failed to trust God’s power and plan.

We see that still today, don’t we? The same excuse given by the people of our world. We too, at times fall into it. What benefit is there in following the Lord?

Sometimes the benefits following the Lord — serving him — aren’t visible or measurable. At any given time Christianity might seem like the losing horse in a race where everyone else is driving a high performance race car. We get 2 days off of work each week, and we’re supposed to give half of one up to go to church? On the first day of every week, before we spend any other money, we are supposed to give a generous offering to the Lord, and cheerfully? Every week? We’re supposed to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ? Love our enemies? And for what? Still we suffer as the rest of the world. All the while we give up the freedom the rest of the world enjoys to do as they please? Why? Where’s the benefit?

To our sinful flesh, many of those other gods seem like a better choice. Money, me, my things, my time, my success, my career...that’s what I’ll throw myself into for my own benefit...my own earthly benefit...my own temporary shallow in the grand scheme of things benefit. Behind each one of those false gods, there is the devil, the father of lies, painting the facade of the benefits of earthly treasures, the facade that says, "If I’m happy today, who cares about tomorrow. If I’m happy today, forget about tomorrow." Except one day tomorrow is going to come. The day of God’s judgment. The day of God’s wrath. Then of what benefit will all the things of this world be for us? None. Of what benefit will our sinful choices for temporary pleasure be for us? Absolutely none. For the false gods of this world do nothing for our sin, our souls, or our salvation. The facade comes crashing down.

It’s why we gather in this place every week to be reminded of the problem we have that cannot be fixed by anything in this world. Think of it this way: Walmart exists because they have a solution to every earthly problem and every earthly need. It’s why people say, “If Walmart doesn’t have it, you don’t need it.” The Church exists for all those other problems that

Walmart can't solve. The problem of sin, death, hell, and the devil. The meaning of life. The truth of what comes after death. The Church has existed for thousands of years as a beacon in this dark world for people who get it, who see the big picture, who look beyond the gods of this world and the benefits of today.

Where did that big picture come from? How is it we get it, while the rest of the world doesn't? It didn't come from any of the false gods that in our sinfulness we choose to serve. It came by the power of the Holy Spirit at the direction of the true God *who chose us*.

Every single false god is put in the highest place in our lives because *we* choose to put them there. The true God is the only God who chose you.

Think about what that means. Before the beginning of time, before you were even born, God chose you, and then knit you together, loved you.

Money doesn't love you, or power, or health, no false god does. When the going gets tough, they are all easily lost. You didn't choose God, he chose you. So when the going gets tough, he still has you, holds you, loves you. Protects, and provides for you.

How could we choose to serve anything or anyone else? And the people understood the argument that Joshua was laying out for them, which really wasn't an argument, just the facts. They responded: "**The LORD drove out of our presence all the peoples and the Amorites who were living in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God!**" They understood the foolishness in serving any other god because of all that the true God had done for them.

Every false god makes you think it's doing something for you, but it's not. You are actually doing something for it. Too many people find out too late in life that all the while they thought they were being served by the things of this world, by fame, fortune, success, earthly happiness, they were really the slaves to those things, missing out on the big picture, all that God had done for them. The true God is the only God who has done something for you. And it was no small deed.

While we were still sinners, while we were still chasing after the gods of this age, still turning our backs on the true God chose us and served us in our greatest need. The Son of God became a slave so that you and I could be God's sons. The Son of God became a slave to death so that you and I could be heirs of eternal life. He took on our sin so that we could be his

righteousness. He submitted to his Father, was forsaken by him, in the exact way that we should have been. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we who should have been slaves to God were made one with God.

What false god has ever treated you like that? What false god has ever served you in any way, much less like this?

The true God is the only God who *serves* you. He's taken all your sins away, made you right with him, ready for heaven already. He's promised to be with you, lead you, guide you, so that all these blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation will not be lost, but will one day be realized fully in heaven — a promise that might not look like much to the world today, especially to those who live by the mantra: Happy today, who cares about tomorrow, but we who know the truth, that our serving God grows out of his service to us, we can flip that around — if tomorrow is set, let today happen, come what may.

What he gives us: Peace today, no worries about tomorrow. Confidence that all things will work out for the good. Comfort in the sorrows we face, even the death of a loved one. Patience in suffering. contentment in every situation. You lack nothing if you have eternal life — and in Jesus, you do!

Today the thing is to do your homework when you're choosing something. Easy to do with the internet and things like consumer reports. Joshua made it clear to the people, and to us, that there is no comparison between the true God and the false gods we set up in our lives.

So, who is your God? Who will you serve? I pray it's an easy question — one that doesn't take much thought — but also one that you consider a lot in your life. For whether you realize it or not, daily that question is put to your faith to make you choose to serve someone or something else. May the words of King David never be far from our hearts: **Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.** May we always strive to serve the only God who has chosen us, to serve the true God who serves us. Amen.