

No Other Gods (3): Which God Will You Serve?

(Joshua 24:10-17)

I. Introduction

- A. We all sometimes have trouble making decisions, right? No? Maybe? *Why is that?*
1. Sometimes we can't decide because our choices make the decision difficult
 - a. Maybe the choices are too good— do you want chocolate mouse or key lime pie?
 - b. Maybe the choices are too bad— do you want the root canal or just pull the tooth?
 - c. Maybe you must choose to take some good along with some bad. It's just hard
 2. Sometimes we can't decide because we are confused by all of our choices.
 - a. When we ask graduating high school senior, "*What will you major in college?*"
 - b. That's code for, "*What will you spend next 45 years doing?*" Hard for 18-year-old!
 3. Sometimes can't decide because we do understand our choices, and hate all of them
 - a. Jack Benny's (*stingy*) old routine where he is held up, "*Your money or your life!*"
 - b. He doesn't anything. The robber says, "*Well?*" Benny says, "*I'm trying to decide!*"
 4. Sometimes it's hard to decide because you're just not invested in any of our choices
 - a. "*I don't care where we go out to eat; you pick a place*" Does that sound familiar?
 - b. Of course, they do pick a place, and you're like, "*Really? Do we have to go there?*"
 5. Sometimes we don't like to decide just because we don't like to make a commitment
 - a. We want to keep options open, like Israel did on Mt. Carmel (**1Kings 18:21**)
 - b. When it comes to which God to serve, we must choose and must choose one
- B. We're continuing today our study of "*No Other Gods,*" a look at our modern idols
1. We started with God's charge in the Ten Commandments "*Have no other gods...*"
 - a. Ten Commandments were founded on the fact that only God was God... alone
 - b. Israel wasted little time building their golden calf and falling to worship it
 - c. So the idea of setting aside the idols to worship one true God didn't come easily
 2. In our study this morning, we'll zoom ahead fifty or so years in Israel's history
 - a. A lot has happened. Moses died; leadership has passed to his lieutenant Joshua
 - b. The Israelites marched into Canaan, and in about seven years have conquered it
 - 1) Land has been divided among the tribes (*and recorded in excruciating detail*)
 - 2) Now they are ready for the unexciting task of settling in and down in new land
 - c. Joshua assembles them a last time for a last pep talk—like he did before a battle
 3. The point of his pep talk had to do with God and idols and which they would choose
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II. Which God Will You Serve: THEN

- A. **Joshua 24** are Joshua's last words to Israel, and he wants to really make them count.
1. He doesn't want to be like Pancho Villa, the old Mexican revolutionary
 - a. As he lay dying, he said, "*Don't let it end like this. Tell them I said something.*"
 - b. Joshua wanted his last words to count; he wanted to leave one last challenge
 2. He wants them to choose "*this day*" which god to serve (**24:14-15**). *They had a choice*
 - a. **Old Choice:** "*beyond the Euphrates*" Go back before Abram deal (*or to Egypt*)
 - b. **New Choice:** "Amorites" (i.e. Canaanites). That will be then real problem
 - c. **Right Choice:** "*But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD*"
 3. Before Israel could build a new life in a new land, they needed to choose their God
 - a. They needed to choose if they believed God was God; Joshua had doubts (**24:19-20**)
 - 1) Why would he say that? Is he baiting them into giving answer he wants to hear
 - 2) Or does he know Israel well enough to suspect that they will have issues?
 - b. Remember what Moses said might happen in the Promised Land (**Deut 8:11-14**)
 - 1) In desert, they needed God and His manna and protection— worship came easy
 - 2) Their new land would make them self-sufficient and don't need God any more
 - c. Part of not needing God any more was looking around at the other gods of Canaan
- B. **Question:** Why were Canaanite gods like Baal and Asherah so appealing to the Israelites?
1. **PROSPERITY:** Baal/Asherah was fertility gods; they had power to grant prosperity
 - a. They could bring fertility to your fields, your flocks and herds and to your wife
 - b. *Couldn't God do that too?* Sure, but then you can use all the help you can get
 - c. Remember, that pagan idea that all gods are gods so all religions are valuable
 2. **PLEASURE:** Baal and Asherah were worshipped as a fertility god and goddess
 - a. Cult prostitution was the ritualized form of religion in service of these gods
 - b. Do I go to Tabernacle to sacrifice a goat or to Baal's temple to act like one?
 - c. That wouldn't happen in Israel, right? God thought it might (**Deut 23:17-18**)
 3. **POWER:** Baal was seen as god of great power; he could get things done
 - a. Inscriptions portray Baal as riding across heavens holding a thunderbolt.
 - b. Elijah's opponents accepted challenge because they expected to win! (**1 Ki 18:24**)
 - c. Baal was the kind of macho-type god you wanted on your side in a dispute

III. Which God Will You Serve: NOW

- A. The basic appeal of Baal and Asherah was the desire for prosperity, pleasure and power
1. Sound familiar? Don't we recognize these as modern idols of money, sex and power?
 - a. Modern idols aren't a way to get money, sex or power; those are idols! (Peter Kreft)
Today, idols are not made of wood, stone, or brass. They are made of money, sex, and power
 - b. We're too sophisticated to bow down to actual little statues of wood, stone or brass
 - c. Our world is driven by the same thing promised long ago by Baal and Asherah!
 2. We want to think idolatry is a quaint and long dead, long forgotten historical ideal
 - a. Idolatry is alive and well in our enlightened modern and postmodern world
"The opposite of theism is not atheism, it's idolatry."(Again from Peter Kreft)
 - b. But all the warnings about the dangers of idols in the Bible are to God's people
 - c. They wanted what Baal and Asherah offered while still claiming to worship God
 3. Our danger is we'll claim to worship God while we worship money, sex and power
- B. The first two false gods pervert God's blessings; the last one seeks to take His place
1. **Money:** Jesus warned us that money could become a false god, right? (**Matt 6:24**)
 - a. Why do we tend to be dismissive (or defensive) when someone raise that point?
 - b. Paul says people who want to be rich are spiritually foolish (**1 Tim 6:9-10**)
 - 1) He goes on to address Christians than ARE rich at the end of the chapter
 - 2) It's not the wealth; it's the importance we attach it (*and getting and keeping it*)
 - 3) It's existence poses a danger; Jesus says we can't serve both God and money
 2. **Sex:** You don't have to look too hard in Bible to know that God created sex to be fun
 - a. He included a whole book in the Bible that is an erotic love poem (*Song of Songs*)
 - b. It's to be enjoyed only in marriage, but it's to be enjoyed (**Prov 5:15, 18-19**)
 - c. Contrast that gift to the crass commodity that our world has made out of sex today
 - 1) Sex is means so little that any consenting adult can have it with any other
 - 2) It can be portrayed in any form as art; it can be used to sell any product at all
 - 3) Sex means so little, the unwanted outcome of sex does too—can be discarded
 3. **Power:** Jesus says his disciples see power differently than the world (**Matt 20:25-26**)
 - a. The true power of the church is the power to serve, the power to put others first
 - b. Greatness in the kingdom is when we act like Christ who gave himself (**20:27-28**)
 - c. Power to rule is God's; our attempts to dominate others are attempts to displace God
- C. Money, sex and power were false gods distracted Israel long ago. They distract us today.

IV. Conclusion

- A. **Imagination Time:** A man has been dealing with a nasty cough for weeks. Constantly.
1. His coughing interrupts everything he does in his life. He can't sleep at night.
 - a. He can't work. He can't have a conversation. Enjoy a meal. Walk around block
 - b. When it gets to when he can't watch football on TV, THEN he goes to the doctor
 2. The doctor pokes and prods and runs tests, and the results come back— Lung Cancer.
 - a. Doctor doesn't want to give bad news; he gives him super-strong cough medicine!
 - b. That cures the cough! The man sleeps better; he can eat, work, and watch football
 3. Of course, cancer is eating away his insides... because coughing was only symptom.
- B. Each week people come here coughing— spiritually struggling with all kinds of issues
1. Stressing. Cheating. Lusting. Spending. Worrying. Medicating. Avoiding. Quitting
 - a. They come here hoping to meet God, hoping to feel better and get a handle on issue
 - b. Sometimes they share their struggles with others; sometimes they ask for prayers
 2. They want to stop coughing—lusting, cheating, worrying, coveting or whatever
 - a. But those are just the symptoms; the real problem they struggle with is idolatry
 - b. Joshua challenged Israel and he challenges us, “*Choose today who you will serve*”
 - c. We can't serve God and Money. Same for sex and power. Only God can be God
- C. How do we know; how can we tell if God is at center? *Preview of video tonight—*
1. **First**, *what disappoints you?* What frustrates us may reveal where we put our hope
 - a. One good indicator of what disappoints us is what do we complain about most
 - b. Complaining, negative spirit reveal that we don't recognize God as being God
 2. **Second**, *where do you spend time and money?* Our heart and money are connected.
 - a. Jesus said, “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (**Matt 6:21**)
 - b. If we spend our money and time only on ourselves, does that show false god?
 3. **Third**, *what do you worry about the most?* Jesus says not to worry at all, but we do
 - a. Money? Politics? What people think? What we worry about show our god
 - b. Peter says to, “*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you*” (**1 Pet 5:7**)
 4. **Fourth**, *what are you the most passionate about?* Sports, music, politics, or work?
 - a. We can become very passionate about those and very dispassionate about God
 - b. Does that seem right if indeed God is at the center? If God really is our God?
- D. Invitation song has this line “*we believe and we choose to obey. Let us be faithful...*”