

Joshua's Final Choice

(Joshua 23 -- 24)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Service with a Smile

Teacher, as an opening exercise, play a game of charades with the children. Have the child act out an action for the others to guess, as follows:

Procedure: Write the following on separate slips of paper for the children to select:

- Serving juice and cookies
- Serving a volleyball
- Serving a Ping-Pong ball
- Serving the Lord

Response:

We use the word “serve” a lot. What does it mean to serve a volleyball? To serve food? To serve other people? What are some other ways people can serve?

How would you act out “Serving the Lord”?

Today we'll talk about what it means to serve God.

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You for always being faithful to us. You love and care for us every minute of every day. We want to show You how much we love You. Teach us today what it means to serve You. We want to live our lives in such a way that is pleasing to You so others will want to know You better. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve....But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15 NKJ)

Every day we have choices to make. (What to wear, what to eat, whether to obey your parents or not.) You can make good choices and bad choices. Every choice we make has consequences.

- What would the consequence be if you chose to disobey your parents? [Let children respond.]
- If you chose to only eat cookies or chips all your life, what would be the consequence? (Poor health)

A really important choice you can make is who to be friends with.

What do you think the consequences would be if you made a poor choice in a friend? That friend could lead you to do wrong things, like stealing or lying or cheating. It's very important to choose friends that will help you make godly choices.

The most important choice you will ever make is whether to believe that Jesus took the punishment for your sin or not. What would be the consequence of choosing NOT to believe that? (Eternal separation from God.)

Lesson

Joshua led the Israelites in their new land for many years. The Israelites had one victory after another as Joshua and the people loved and served God and followed His commands. God helped them defeat 31 different kings!

Joshua divided the Promised Land among the twelve family groups of the children of Israel. By the time we pick up the story this morning he was 110 years old.

Joshua 23:1-2

The years passed, and the LORD had given the people of Israel rest from all their enemies. Joshua, who was now very old, called together all

the elders, leaders, judges, and officers of Israel. He said to them, "I am now a very old man.

Joshua knew he was growing old. His long life as leader of the Israelites was coming to an end. But he hadn't finished the job of taking the Promised Land. There were still groups of people living in the Promised Land that God wanted to destroy. Joshua knew that the Israelites were going to have a lot more work to do.

So he called the leaders of the people together. He had seen God do many mighty miracles, and he wanted the Israelites to remember God's goodness to them. The people came to hear Joshua speak for the last time.

Joshua 23:3

You have seen everything the LORD your God has done for you during my lifetime. The LORD your God has fought for you against your enemies.

Joshua encourages the children of Israel. He is saying "You have seen the power of God, you know His track record. Even though I won't be here to lead you, don't worry, God will help you finish the job."

Joshua 23:5-6

This land will be yours, for the LORD your God will himself drive out all the people living there now. You will take possession of their land, just as the LORD your God promised you. "So be very careful to follow everything Moses wrote in the Book of Instruction. Do not deviate from it, turning either to the right or to the left.

Joshua warns the children of Israel to always love and obey God and not to ever follow after the false gods of the people who still remain in the land.

Joshua 23:7-8

Make sure you do not associate with the other people still remaining in the land. Do not even mention the names of their gods, much less swear

by them or serve them or worship them. Rather, cling tightly to the LORD your God as you have done until now.

Joshua then reminds the people that it is by God's might that the peoples have been driven out before them, and not by their own strength.

Joshua 23:9

For the LORD has driven out great and powerful nations for you, and no one has yet been able to defeat you.

Joshua again tells the people to love and obey God.

Joshua 23:11

So be very careful to love the LORD your God.

Joshua warns them not to follow after other gods and warns them about what will happen if they don't stay loyal to God.

Joshua 23:12-13

"But if you turn away from him and cling to the customs of the survivors of these nations remaining among you, and if you intermarry with them, then know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive them out of your land. Instead, they will be a snare and a trap to you, a whip for your backs and thorny brambles in your eyes, and you will vanish from this good land the LORD your God has given you.

As long as the children of Israel loved and obeyed God, all would go well for them. But, if they started to follow after false gods, then God would stop taking care of them.

The people promised to always love and obey God.

Joshua 24:24

The people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God. We will obey him alone."

But Joshua knew that just saying the words was not enough.

Joshua 24:26-27

Joshua recorded these things in the Book of God's Instructions. As a reminder of their agreement, he took a huge stone and rolled it beneath the terebinth tree beside the Tabernacle of the LORD. Joshua said to all the people, "This stone has heard everything the LORD said to us. It will be a witness to testify against you if you go back on your word to God."

Joshua took a large stone and set it up under an oak tree to remind the people of the choice they had made. The Israelites had promised to serve only God. This stone would always remind the people of the agreement they had made with the Lord.

If they broke that promise, they would know that they only had themselves to blame. It was their choice and they would have to face the consequences.

Choices

The choices we make can tell a lot about us. Our choices show what is important to us. When we love God, our choices will show others our love for Him. When we love God, we will choose to show God's kind of love to others. God will help us make wise choices.

Service

Our verse for today not only talks about choices, but also about serving. This verse encourages us to choose to serve God.

As we learned earlier, we use the word "serve" in lots of different ways. (We can serve food to people, we can serve a volleyball or a ping-pong ball in a game.)

Is it possible to serve people?

If you were hired to be a servant to someone, what sorts of ways might they ask you to serve? (Prepare and serve food, clean the house, etc.) A servant's task is to do what his "master" requires, to be pleasing to him.

What do you think it means to serve the Lord? How do you do that? When have you seen someone serve God? What did that person do?

What are some ways *you* could serve God? (Help others. Obey His commands. Tell others about Him.) We can also serve God by worshipping Him. We can sing songs to Him, pray to Him and read His word.

Is it possible for you to serve another god beside our God, the Creator of the Universe?

In Joshua's time a lot of people made fake gods of wood and stone. We don't worship fake gods today, but sometimes we pay too much attention to things that aren't really important. Sometimes those things can push God into last place in our lives.

Anything that distracts you from loving and obeying God, can become an idol. If you spend more time playing video games than spending time with God, those video games have become an idol!

What kinds of things keep *you* from putting God first in your life? (TV, sports, toys, video games, and friends.)

A true servant of the Lord desires to honor God with their thoughts, words and deeds.

But what if I went through a whole day, able to check off everything on my to-do list, but was grumbling and complaining as I did each task? Am I serving the Lord with my thoughts?

When I choose to be pleasing to God in whatever I do, then no matter what my task is, I can serve the Lord with my thoughts!

When I desire to live in a way that is pleasing to Him – in my thoughts, words and deeds – then I begin to hear God's voice. When I listen and obey, I learn what God's will is for me in life's many different situations. Then He can carry out His will through me; I become a true servant of the Lord!

If you are a child of God, then you should choose to serve, love and obey God and give Him first place in your life. Why do you think that God deserves your love? [Teacher, discuss who God is and what He has done for us.]

God deserved the love of the Israelites; He had proved Himself to be a mighty God on their behalf. And He deserves our love, too.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for Your love and care. We pray today that You will help us to always choose to love, serve, and obey You by showing love towards everyone You send into our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Game Center

Memory Verse Card Game

Preparation: Divide Joshua 24:15 into sections. Print each section on a separate index card. Make two complete sets of verse cards. Mix together cards from both sets and place face down in a stack.

Procedure: Divide class into two teams. (If you have a large class, divide class into additional teams.) Students from each team take turns choosing cards from the stack, trying to collect a complete set of verse cards. If the student's team needs the card to complete the verse, student keeps the card, placing it face up in front of the team. If the student's team already has the card, he or she returns the card to the bottom of the stack. Play continues until both teams have completed the verse.

Say, Joshua said these words when he was reminding the people to love, serve and obey God. How did he serve God? (Obeyed what God asked him to do in the battles. Led the people across the river and

around Jericho like God told him to do. Helped the Gibeonites even though they tricked him. Always reminded the people of God's ways and why they should obey them.)

Choose God

Materials: Markers, scrap paper, a large trash can, a clothesline or rope, and a Bible.

Preparation: Place a trash can in the center of the room. Lay a ten-foot clothesline (or rope) circle around the trash can. Set out markers and scrap paper.

Say: In Joshua's time a lot of people made fake gods of wood and stone. How do you think it would feel to bow and pray before a statue made of wood or stone? We don't worship fake gods today, but sometimes we pay too much attention to things that aren't really important. Sometimes those things can push God into last place in our lives. What kinds of things keep you from putting God first in your life? (TV, sports, toys, and friends.)

Procedure:

Using the markers and scratch paper, write the word or draw a picture of at least three things that tempt you to use too much of your time.

[Teacher, explain to the children that the pictures will be used for a game and won't be kept.] When the children all have finished their pictures, have them wad them up into paper balls. Then, from behind the clothesline circle, have the children take turns shooting "baskets" with their paper wads. Each time someone "Scores," have all the children shout, "Choose God!" Play until all the paper wads are in the trash can.

Afterwards, have children join hands around the circle and end in prayer.] Dear God, we want to choose you today. We're throwing away things that tempt us to forget You. Help us remember that You're our one, true God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Or, use the following review questions in a discussion or game of your choice.

1. What are some reasons Joshua gave the people for choosing to serve and obey God? (God gave them food and water. God helped them defeat enemies.)
2. What are some important choices everyone has to make? (To become part of God's family or not. To serve God or to ignore God's instructions. To do what is right or do what is wrong. To care only about themselves or to care about others.) Why are these choices important?
3. When have you seen someone serve God? What did that person do? How did it affect other people?
4. What do you think people who have chosen to serve God should do? (Show God's love by treating others fairly. Be patient with younger brothers and sisters. Read and pay attention to the Bible.)
5. What are some ways you can serve God at home? (Help without complaining. Learn more about God by reading the Bible and praying.) At school? (Do the best job possible. Be kind to other kids.) With friends? (Keep promises. Help friends with problems. Say kind words.)

Sword Drills

1. Read **Deuteronomy 10:12-13**. What do these verses say to do (the words "to fear" mean to honor or respect)? How can you serve God in these ways every day?
2. Read **Joshua 24:15**. What is the choice this verse tells us to make? Why do you think it is important to serve God?

3. Read **John 13:13-16**. How did Jesus serve His disciples? Why does He tell them to serve others? What can you do to obey Jesus by serving other people?
4. Read **Romans 12:11-13**. How do these verses tell us to act? How have you obeyed these verses in the past?

Other Game Questions:

1. When Joshua was 110 years old, who did he gather together? (The elders, leaders, judges, and officers of Israel.)
2. Why did he call together the leaders of the people? (He knew he would soon die and he wanted to encourage them to keep following the Lord.)
3. Who or what does Joshua warn the people to stay away from? (The Canaanites and their false gods.)
4. What will the consequence be if the people do not turn away from the Canaanites and their false gods? (Verse 13 says they will vanish from this good land the Lord has given them.)
5. What promise did the people make to Joshua? (That they would always serve and obey God.)
6. What does Joshua do to help the people remember their promise to always serve and obey God? (He put a huge stone under a tree to remind the people of their promise.)
7. Why do you think that God deserves our love and obedience? (He is a great and mighty God. He loves us and protects us and provides abundantly for us.)
8. Why is it important to make good choices? (Every choice has a consequence. Bad choices lead to bad consequences.)
9. Why is it important to serve God? (He deserves our honor.)

10. How do we serve God? (To serve is to obey. When we choose show His love to other people, we are choosing to love and obey Him.)
11. What can distract us from choosing to serve God? (Our idols: TV, video games, sports—anything that keeps us from loving and obeying God.)