

Mid South Conference 1981-02 the People of Israel

by Aldy Fam Fanous

The choice before us is to serve the Lord or to serve other gods, and it is a choice that has consequences for our lives and our eternity.

Duration: 33:59

Scripture: Joshua 24:1-3, Matthew 6:33, John 6:37, Revelation 3:2, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Israel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of a tragic incident that occurred during a summer camp. Two young people, full of life and laughter just moments before, drowned while swimming in the sea. The speaker reflects on the brevity of life and emphasizes the importance of recognizing the fragility of our existence. The sermon then transitions to a discussion of man's free choice, drawing from the biblical story of Joshua and the Israelites. The speaker highlights the significance of true discipleship and the need for genuine repentance in one's spiritual journey.

Transcript

To the book of Joshua, chapter 24. Joshua, chapter 24. After this wonderful voice from the Lord this morning, we read a portion that ties in with what we've heard.

An ample proof that God is leading and the Spirit of God is in control. Joshua, chapter 24, verses 1, 2 and 3. And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of the Lord of Israel and for their heads and for the judges and for their officers. And they presented themselves before God.

And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old times. Even tell of the father of Abraham and the father of Neher. And they served other gods.

And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood and led him throughout all the land of Canaan and multiplied his seed and gave him Isaac. Then go please to verse 14. Now therefore, fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in truth.

And put away the gods which your father served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether

the gods which your father served that were on the other side of the flood or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Lord bless us for reading these words. I do trust that some of us in this camp will hear the still, small voice. I do trust that this place to many of us will be a place of divine revelation and to others will be a place of rebuke.

Perhaps to some it will be a place of humiliation. And to all of us it will be a place where we meet with God who only can supply our needs. He only is what we need.

Joshua brought the people to a very historical site. You will remember that Moses, before he died, he charged Joshua to bring the people to that place. Six tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim and six other tribes will stand on Mount Ebal.

And Joshua was to erect a pile of stone covered with plaster, by the word of the Lord the plaster, and then remind the people of the blessings if they follow Jehovah and of the curse if they drifted away from him. That place was a very interesting place, the valley of Shechem. Jacob came to it before.

Abraham came to it and built his first altar and saw his first vision. This is the place that Joshua brought the people to. He brought all the people, the heads of the people, to that very place.

And he put before them a choice. Choose you, this day, whom you will serve. Someone will ask me, am I free to choose? Am I free to choose? Or am I predestined to a course of action and a course of life that has been foreordained for me before the foundation of the world? There is a very hot theological war going on today between free choice, free will, and predestination, election, which is God's mind for man.

I do not wish to say today that I am here to give you the right answer. If you had asked me 50 years ago, when I was only one year in the faith, I would have told you the reason. I knew everything at that time.

I have never been so smart in my life. Now, after 51 years, I will tell you I don't know. I don't know.

I don't even know what I used to say at that time. All I know is, in God's word, in His mind, both are set forth before you. Turn with me, please, to John, chapter 6. The Gospel of John, chapter 6. We're going to read a very important verse there.

It has both doctrines, both teachings set aside, one by one. Verse 37. Chapter 6 and verse 37.

All that the Father giveth unto me shall come to me. And they, and those, sorry, and him that cometh to me, I will know why is cast out. Please mark this very clearly.

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me. That's predestination. The Father gives them to the Son.

They don't have anything to do with that. It is the Father's will. Then him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.

That is free will. Free choice. Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.

Side by side. How does it happen? I don't know. God knows.

All I know is that the Father gives you to the Son, and you exercise your free will, your free choice by coming to the Son. How do you do it? You do it because you want to do it. And we find many examples in

God's Word about the free choice.

It's my topic this morning. Man's free choice as we see in the children of Israel's history, and in the history of the child of God. O Jerusalem, our brother referred to this morning, how many times I have wanted, I would gather you, but he would not.

How many times? I would, but he would not. You have the free will to choose. And I want you please to notice this topic this very, especially this morning, because of what is happening today.

We are criminally neglecting telling the people about the basic and fundamental meaning of true discipleship. True discipleship. Through discipleship the Lord is built upon true repentance.

And we have neglected to put before the people what it means to repent. True repentance means accepting the Lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not only Savior, but He is Lord.

You cannot accept Him as Savior and deny Him His rights of ruling and reigning in your life, His Lordship. You will have to quote Revelation 3.20, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in.

And you stop there. No, sir. Continue the verse.

Stop with him and he with me. He with me. He comes in as a guest, but then he takes his rightful place.

You stop with him. You remember what happened in John chapter 12? In chapter 11 the Lord raised Lazarus from the dead. In chapter 12 in Bethany they gave him a feast.

And by the way, Bethany, names in the Middle East are important. And I said, Beth is house, and Ani or Ana is sorrow or affliction. The house of affliction.

My apologies to those who serve at Bethany Chapel. But this is the house of affliction. And in the house of affliction there is a feast.

Why? Why? How can it be that in the house of affliction there is a feast? Because Christ is there. Take the Lord with you. In the valley of fear.

In the valley of death. And you will have a feast. Eternal joy.

All right, what happened? We read that there Martha served. But Lazarus was one of them that sat at meat with Jesus. Whose house was it? I mentioned this before.

Whose house was it? Lazarus' house. Who was the guest? Jesus. Who was the host? Lazarus.

It doesn't say so. It doesn't say that Jesus was one of them that sat at table with Lazarus. It says Lazarus was one of them that sat at table with Jesus.

So Jesus was the host, and Lazarus was the guest in his own home. This is exactly what should be the case in your life and mine. I do not belong to myself.

All that I have, all that I am, I owe to the Lord. The very breath of life in your nostrils is a gift from God. He can take it away any time he likes.

So there it is. And what does the next verse say? To him that overcometh, I will grant to sit in my throne. He is on the throne.

He is Lord. And true discipleship is built on true repentance. And true repentance meaning accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord.

Not only as your Savior. All right. What is the tragic result of modern evangelism? Modern evangelism is so concerned about having a number of conversions, or rather a confession of conversions, and then we neglect the meaning of repentance to people.

This is a tragic approach and leaves many people in doubt or under the illusion that they are saved when they are not. That they have not really accepted Christ as their Lord. Right.

We are going to consider the question of free choice, which is set before us now under a number of headings. First of all, it was a real choice. These people were not robots.

They were moral beings. Choose ye this day whom you will serve. And even if you have made the right choice and accepted Christ as your Savior, there is a danger of growing cold.

So you are to worship the Lord only. The dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee. Worship only thee.

We are worshiping every day whoever we worship. And so this is a real choice. You as a sinner have to choose today to serve the Lord or to serve other gods.

You as a son of God have to choose today because you are liable to grow cold if your fellowship with the Lord is broken somehow. Secondly, it is an inescapable choice. Inescapable choice.

Please mark he didn't say choose ye this day whether ye will serve the Lord or not. No. You have to serve someone.

You either serve God or mammon. You either serve God or Satan. Oh, I know some people laugh at the idea of Satan today.

They laugh at the idea of the devil. They don't want to accept the existence of the devil. And the devil is not any more pleased than this to be laughed out of court.

Friend, if you are not serving the Lord, you are serving the devil by proxy maybe, serving lust, serving money, serving fame, serving some other gods. If you are not serving the Lord, you are serving other gods. Choose ye this day whom you will serve.

Whom you will serve. And if the Son will set you free, you shall be free indeed. Thirdly, it is a rational choice.

Please mark that Joshua did not ask the people to choose at the beginning of his speech. He kept this till the very end. He noted at least 16 instances.

16 instances of God's interference on their behalf. And at the end he said, Choose therefore ye this day whom you will serve. Friends, I am not now appealing to your emotions.

I am appealing to your reasons. What has the devil given you, my friends, that you claim so to the wheel of his chariot? Every sorrow that you have borne, every sigh that you have uttered, every heartache that you have been through, every grave on which you stood and shed tears, you owe to the devil. And you still serve him? Of course he gives you some return.

But only what appealed to your fallen nature, which he had warped and distorted and destroyed. The thief does not come except to steal and to kill and to destroy. I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.

You don't have only life in Christ, but you have life more abundantly. You ask me what is the more abundant life? It is the victorious Christian life. Christ saved you to live a life of victory.

We referred last night to the fact that Christ is alive today. To some of us it seems that Christ is dead. Why are you so sad? Why is that long face that you have? Why is that defeat that you suffer? It is because Christ is not alive to you.

He is alive today. And he is alive forevermore. And he has called you to a life of victory.

I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but Christ lives in me.

And this victorious life depends upon your fellowship with the Lord. David was a man after God's own heart. But he was strongest when he was in fellowship with the Lord.

Do you remember when he was chased by Saul for a long time? And one day Saul fell into his hands. He could have finished him with one stroke. But he decided not to do it.

God forbid that I should touch the Lord's anointed. And he cut a part of the hem of his clothes. And his heart smote because he did so.

Later on he committed two of the most heinous crimes. He committed adultery. He committed a murder.

But no prick of conscience. Not at all. Why? He was out of fellowship with the Lord.

He couldn't feel anything wrong. Until Nathan came to him. And after a long discourse with Nathan.

Nathan put his finger to his forehead. Thou art the man. Thou art the man.

And then he broke down in tears and repented before the Lord. Friend, is there anything in your life today which is standing in the way between you and victory? What do you call that thing? Called by its name. It is sin.

Sin. In the life of the child of God. Turn with me please to 1 Chronicles 5. 1 Chronicles 5. We had a very meaningful experience there.

In 1 Chronicles 5. Now the sons of Reuben. The firstborn of Israel. For he was the firstborn.

But for as much as he defied his father's bid. His birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph. The son of Israel.

And the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. What is the Holy Spirit saying here? Note please that there were three major privileges for the firstborn. Under the Old Testament economy.

The firstborn had the double share of the inheritance. Number one. Number two.

The firstborn was the priest of the tribe. The link between the tribe and God. Number three.

The firstborn was the leader in Israel. The leader among his brethren. Three major privileges for the firstborn.

This man Reuben according to birth was the firstborn. But he committed a terrible crime. For the pleasure of one moment.

For the transient pleasure of one moment. He lost all. He lost the double portion to Joseph.

The sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim. He lost the priesthood to Levi. And he lost the leadership to Judah.

He lost everything. Lock, stock and barrel. Why? Because he stepped out of fellowship with the Lord.

He committed adultery. Friend, child of God. Choose you this day whom you will serve.

You are faced with a choice. An inescapable choice. And a rational choice.

It is a rational choice. I plead now with you according to your ration. I speak to your ration, to your reason.

Your reasonable choice. Choose you this day whom you will serve. So it is definitely a rational choice.

Then, again, it is an exclusive choice. Exclusive choice. After he put this choice before the people, the people said, We will choose to serve the Lord.

What did Joshua say? No. No. You cannot serve the Lord.

If this happened today, what would the modern preacher do? Quick! Get them into the council room. Dish out the cards. Take up their names and addresses.

Joshua said, No, you cannot serve the Lord. Because he is a jealous God. And a holy God.

Holy in twofold sense. He is holy because he cannot tolerate evil. And he is holy because he loves righteousness.

He cannot tolerate evil. Child of God. God does not tolerate to look to evil.

Even if this sin is put on the shoulders of his only son. When the sin of the world was put on the body of Jesus Christ. He, God, hid his face from him.

That's why Christ cried, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Remember the prayer of the Lord in the Governing Gestimony? Father, if it be thy will that this cup should pass from me, nevertheless not my will, but thine be done. What cup was he referring to? He was not referring to the cross, to the thorn. That was agony indeed.

But that was not the cup. It was not the spear that pierced his side. That was agony indeed.

But not the cup yet. It was not the railing and the mocking of the people. That was agony indeed.

But not the cup which the Lord drilled to drink. What was the cup which he drilled to drink? Separation from the Father, from God. Separation from God.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And why did he go through it? For you and for me. God cannot look to evil. He is a holy God.

If you deny him, he will abide faithful and he cannot deny himself. What does it mean? We are really mistaken if we think it only means that he cannot deny his kindness or his favour. But it also means he cannot deny his holiness.

If you walk in the way which is not according to God's will, he will use the rod of chastisement. Yes, punishment is in the programme of God. If you have a child, say eight or nine or ten years old, and he or she comes to breakfast table late and not in the mood.

In bad humour she got out alongside of bed that morning. What will you do? She is sulky, complaining, nothing is right. I think you do right to understand there is a part of her anatomy where justice can be administered.

And you administer it too. What happens then? Oh, she howls her head off and goes to the other room. And she is crying.

Why is she crying? Not because she is hurt. Not because she is sore in that part of her anatomy. Oh no, she is crying before because her ego.

Her ego is suffering. Later on, after half an hour, one hour, you hear the lost voice, Mummy, Daddy, I am sorry. I am sorry.

And she comes and puts her arms around your neck and she repents and says I am sorry. What happened really? Did she cease to be your child? Of course not. She is even more precious to you at that time.

You are in prayer, you and your wife are in prayer for her. She has stepped out of fellowship with her parents. But she was still your child.

So it happens with you. When you are out of the will of God, God uses His Lord. You do not cease to be His child.

You do not lose your salvation. You are His. You are His.

My sheep hear my voice and they follow me. And I know them, they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life.

And they shall never perish. Neither can any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father who gave him me is greater than all.

And no man can pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one. Have you ever seen a sheepfold in the Middle East? If you have not seen it, try when you go next time to see a sheepfold.

It is a circular wall with an opening. But no actual door of wood or iron. No gate, no door.

This opening is the door. And the shepherd sleeps across the opening. And no beast can go in to the fold except passing through or by way of the door of the shepherd.

That is why the Lord said, I am the door of the sheep. No man can touch you in the fold except he touches the Lord Himself. See how precious you are to Him.

See how precious you are to Him. You are His child. And His child forevermore.

Yes, friend, you are faced now with an inescapable choice and an exclusive choice. He is a jealous God. Jealousy is the word of love, isn't it? You are jealous of your wife, for your wife.

You don't want to share her affection with someone else. So it is with you, between you and the Lord. He is a jealous God.

Choose you this day whom you will serve. Whom are you serving this morning? Whom are you serving today? It is an exclusive choice. It is also a vital choice.

Mirazim was real, actual. People standing there, six tribes represented there. And also Mount Ebal, the Mount of Cursing, was actual and vital.

And God will follow you day by day with His blessing if you follow Him day by day closely. Walk behind Him. Hear His voice.

The small, still voice is speaking to you. And friend, it is definitely a vital choice today. It is also a personal choice.

Choose who? You. I cannot make this choice for you. Your dad cannot make it for you.

Your wife cannot make it for you. Your husband cannot make it for you. Choose you this day whom He will serve.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Then please note, it is an immediate choice. Immediate choice.

I am rushing through these points because I have no time. But it is definitely an immediate choice. Why? Because He says, choose you this day.

This day. Friend, you don't know how long your life is. What is your life? I shall never forget an experience and you will pardon a personal experience.

In the school I was principal of in Cairo, Egypt. One day, Monday morning, the head boy came in to me. He was so sad and almost angry.

I said, Father, what's wrong with you? What's the matter? He said, Have you not heard, sir? Not heard? I said, What? Oh, he named the boy and he said, So and so passed away. I said, No, impossible. He was here at school last Friday.

There is no school on Sunday and on Saturday. But he was there on Friday. He said, Yes.

He went home after school on Friday. He was 13 years old. And he had a slight cough.

He was doing his homework. We give a lot of homework in that part of the world. And they do their homework up till perhaps 9, 10 o'clock, sometimes 11 o'clock at night.

His mother noticed that he had a slight cough. And said, Honey, you are coughing. Take this cup and drink it.

Mixer, cough mixer. He said, No, mummy, this is a very slight cough. I really am not coughing.

Just a slight cough. He said, All right, because it may develop with you and get worse. Please drink this.

And she did not know. She was pouring down his throat rat poison. Right.

He was rushed to the hospital. But it was too late. She killed her own son with her own hands.

In all sincerity. In all good purpose. All good intention.

Of course, he could not get over it. She ended in a military asylum. She lost, killed her own son.

Friend, what is your life? I shall never forget another experience. It was our custom to take the boys to a boys camp each summer. By the seaside.

One year I took 52 children. High school children. Ages 16, 17, 18 to 19.

We had a number of officers with us too. Next to us was a camp for the faculty of engineering. By the seaside.

One day they asked us if we would play a game with them of volleyball on our grounds. We accepted gladly. And it was a wonderful game.

Everybody was happy. Laughing, jumping. Joking.

They were very, very happy and glad. The game ended at 12 o'clock noon. And the visiting team went to their tents.

Our team came to their tents for lunch. About 12 o'clock. Only 15 minutes later.

15 minutes later. I heard whistling. Shouting.

Running. I went out of my tent to see what was happening. And I ran with those who were running.

I didn't know why I was running. Everybody was running, so I ran with them too. We came to a group of people by the seashore.

On the beach. I pushed my way through. What did I see? There were two of them, one fit to the other.

Instead of walking back, let us swim back. Further exercise. A good wash.

And they did. But neither of them was a good swimmer. One of them fell in trouble, the other went to help him.

They both dragged themselves to the bottom. And they were actually drowned. I can close my eyes now and picture them before me.

Two young people. In the prime of youth. Age 20, 21, 22 at the most.

23 at the most. 15 minutes ago, they were full of life. Playing.

Of course, they were thinking a long life ahead of them. If I had come to them to say, get ready because in 15 minutes you will be in eternity. What do you think they would have said to me? Nonsense.

We have a long life ahead of us. How long was their life? 15 minutes. Isn't this what James means? What is your life? What is your life? Puff of smoke? Vapors? Steam? It is now here.

And disappears. Choose you when? This day. Choose you this day.

Whom you will serve. It is an immediate choice. Why is it immediate? Because of your age, my friend.

Don't take offense, please. But today you are older than you were a year ago, right? Your life today is one year less than it was a year ago. And because of your age, never mind whether you are small or middle-aged or old-aged, because of your age, choose you this day whom you will serve.

And I pray the Lord that in this hush of this hour you make the right choice. The dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee. Worship only thee.

Also it is an immediate choice because of the influence brought to bear upon you. You have heard God's word in your chapel, in your assembly, in your place of worship a number of times. You've heard it this morning.

You've heard it last night. You've heard God speaking to you through His word. Because of this influence, choose you this day.

Heed His voice. Heed His voice. Choose you this day whom you will serve.

And also because of this very place you are in. How many times people came under the sound of the gospel in this conference. And many of them have made the right choice.

Praise God for that. Perhaps, I say sorrowfully, some of them have not made the right choice. Where are they now, friends? Choose you this day whom you will serve.

Last of all, it is an abiding choice. You shall never lose it if you've made the right choice here. Mary chose that good portion.

We shall never be taken away from her. All that the world gives you will leave you one day or you will leave it. You will either leave it one day or it will leave you.

It doesn't matter how rich you are, how famous you are, how well to do you are. One day you will either leave it behind or it will leave you. Someone has said he is no fool who gives away that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.

Think of it, friends. Think of it, friends. Choose you this day whom you will serve.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. This is free choice. God willing, tomorrow we'll be considering predestination or foreknowledge.

Shall we pray? Loving Heavenly Father, in the quietness of this hour we bow before Thee. We confess before Thee now that in many times we have not lived up to what we preach, to what we hear, to what we believe. Forgive our foolish ways.

And if someone today is convicted by Thee, Spirit of the Living God, we pray that such and when be brought back to fellowship with Thyself. Spirit of God, Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me. Break me.

Mold me. Bless me. Use me to be all to the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We ask it in His name and for His sake. Amen.

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