

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, September 25, 2011 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

The Invitation - Joshua 24:14-15

Introduction: One fall day a wife found a “*To do*” list on her husband’s desk entitled: Things to do before Winter: 1. Chop firewood. 2. Check weather-stripping. 3. Clean furnace. 4. Clean and repair snow blower. 5. Replace storm windows. 6. Install tire chains. OR - Get out of Wisconsin!

Decisions in life are important. This morning, at the end of the service, you will be asked to make a decision. We call it “*The Invitation*,” and it is an opportunity for people to decide if they are going to accept something concerning the Christian way of life.

Now when you receive a normal invitation -let’s say to a party or a shower, most of the time, it comes with an RSVP - which means you are to reply back with either “*Accept*” or “*Decline*.”

Every Sunday at church, decisions are made during the invitation. Some respond by accepting Christ or a truth of God, and they find it to be the beginning of a life-changing experience.

However, some will decline the invitation. And by declining the invitation, those people are either saying, “*I don’t believe that*,” or “*It’s not for me*,” or “*Not right now*,” or maybe they are saying, “*Just leave me alone. I don’t want to hear it*.” And every time a decision such as that is made, there is a certain risk involved because one never knows if they’ll ever have another opportunity to make another decision.

But the majority of decisions at the close of a worship service would fall in the category of “*I don’t know*” - meaning, “*I’m really not sure if I want to do this because it’s so unknown to me*.” If that’s you...if you’ve ever wondered, “*What does God expect me to do, and how will it affect my life if I do it*,” then listen closely. Today can make a difference in your life that will last for an eternity. Our topic today is decisions and I’d like to share with you some of the choices you may face during today’s invitation. Turn to Joshua 24:14-15, and let’s pray. The first choice is:

1. Salvation.

Our text for today refers to a discourse Joshua had with the Children of Israel toward the end of Joshua’s life. These people had been led by Moses out of bondage in Egypt to a land of their own which God had promised them, but before they entered into the Promised Land, Moses died, and Joshua was chosen to finish the job, which he did with great skill and might.

Now, after years of leadership and conquering all enemies, Joshua himself was about to die. So he sent word that all the people should gather for some final instructions. Joshua reminded them about their great God who had led them, protected them, and provided for them. Joshua told them that their God is worthy of their devotion. He said in **Joshua 24:14**, “*Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.*” Then he gave an invitation in **vs. 15**. He said, “*But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers 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.*”

Joshua says “*choose for yourselves*.” In other words, “*You’ve seen what God has done for us all these years. You’ve experienced first-hand His power and provision. And you know what God expects of us but now it’s up to you as to what you are going to do about this. YOU choose.*”

This morning, here we are thousands of years later, and God is still issuing the same invitation through pastors, evangelists, missionaries, and witnesses: “*Choose for yourselves!*” Each person has a choice to make today - What will you do with Jesus? I can tell you about His love for you when He chose to come to the earth and live as you do. I can tell you about His sinless life and all the miracles of healing and rescue He performed. I can tell you about the sacrifice of love He made for you when He died on a cross for your sins. And I can tell you how He came back to life three days later to provide for your salvation. I can tell you these things, and about how Jesus calls you to come to Him and find forgiveness for your sins and eternal rest for your weary souls. I can tell you about the peace in your heart and joy for living you’ll find once you accept Christ, but ultimately it’s up to you to decide what you are going to do with Jesus.

Joshua knew the God who had led him this far so he made his choice. He said, *"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* He and his family chose Jehovah God as the God he would follow, serve, and obey. But even though Joshua was their leader, he could not make the choices for the people. Each person had to decide for themselves if they would follow God or not. It was an individual choice for them and it's still an individual choice. Even though millions have already made their choice, it still comes down to a personal decision. Will you accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord, or will you reject Him? That is a personal decision but we're called to make it public.

You see, people may wonder what is expected of them when a public invitation is given, and here it is. We ask folks to make this very personal decision public because of what Jesus says in **Matthew 10:32 (NIV)** *"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."*

The word *"acknowledge"* means *"to agree with."* It carries the idea of identification. When we confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we identify with Him that we belong to Him.

The verse says to acknowledge Christ *"before men."* In the Greek, the literal meaning is, *"in front of."* Here is the way it works... When you fully realize what God's gift of salvation does for you, then you will want others to know about it and receive it as well. Because you identify yourself with Jesus before others, you're saying, I'm not ashamed of Jesus and I want to share Him with anyone. That is what the invitation is for!

Should you be saved today? Well, you should if God is speaking to you personally, and you realize that you're a sinner and cannot save yourself. You should make it public if you've never done that before. YES, by all means, come and settle it once and for all when the invitation is given. The second choice is:

2. Believer's Baptism.

Some may have made the decision for salvation, but you've never followed the Lord in believer's baptism. In **Acts 2:38 (NIV)**, some people had heard Peter preach the gospel and were convicted of their sins. They asked Peter what they were to do next, and he told them: *"Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for (lit. "because of") the forgiveness of your sins..."* So, if for no other reason, a person should be baptized **after** they are saved because it's the biblical thing to do. But there are other good reasons.

For example, submitting to baptism after salvation is an act of worship which also gives folks an opportunity to publically obey the command of God. It's one of the first ways a new believer can give a testimony that he or she has confessed Christ as Savior and Lord. Furthermore, it encourages others to be obedient to God.

I remember my own baptism. Now we didn't have a baptistery in our church, so I was baptized in a creek, which was not real convenient especially in October! After the morning service, we all went home to lunch then we met down at the creek at that afternoon for the baptism. This meant that my Dad, who was the song leader, had to drag out the hymn books and carry them down to the creek. This meant that some of the men of the church had to load up chairs and then unload them and tote them down the creek bank. This meant that everyone had to park on the dirt road end to end, and then walk a ways just to get to the steep bank that led to the creek.

Now I wasn't too worried about any of that stuff because my three biggest fears were:

1. Was the preacher going to drop me, 'cause I couldn't swim?
2. Since one of my cousins had told me about her baptism experience of hitting her head on a rock on the way down under the water, my fear was, "Would that happen to me too?" And
3. Snakes!

But you know, after I was baptized, the thing I remember the most was all the people who came out to witness it. Of course my family was there, but also standing there on that creek bank were all the people who had taught me in Sunday School and R.A.'s. These were the ones who had prayed for me and loved me. I was witnessing to them what Jesus had done in my life and their prayers and works were not in vain. It encouraged them.

Now you don't have to be baptized to go to heaven. The thief on the cross wasn't. And Jesus took him to heaven that very day. But, I believe that if he had an opportunity to come down from that cross, he would have followed Jesus in baptism.

No, baptism doesn't save a person. But a person who has truly been saved should want to start their Christian life by being obedient. If you've never been baptized as a believer, this morning's invitation is for you to come and get your new life started off right. Finally, the third choice this morning is:

3. Church Membership.

Why should believers be united together in God's church? There are many reasons, but I want to only share three. First:

A. God's Church is a CARING church. God's church is not a building with bricks, stones, and wood. God's church is made up of people who share a common experience of having put their faith in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. God's church is made up of people who've experienced the joys and trials of living a Christian life and following the teachings of Jesus. Only in the church, will you find people who know your faults and accept you anyway. Only in the church will you find people who will pray for you, love you, and who will understand your hurts and share your joys.

Just ask anyone who has been in this church for any length of time and they will tell you, they don't know how they could have made it through their tough times without the caring, loving compassion of their church family. Why should you belong to God's church? It's made up of people who care, but also:

B. God's Church is a COMMUNITY Church. The New Testament writer said in **Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)** "*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another....*" Meeting together for worship regularly is one of the most visible marks of God's church isn't it? There is something about gathering with God's people to worship Him that can't be experienced listening to an evangelist on TV.

What is it that something special we find when we gather on Sundays for worship that you can't find in other places?

Jesus said in **Mt. 18:20 (NIV)**, "*...where two or three have come together in my name, there am I with them.*" Jesus is with us when we worship together! And we're here to worship and adore Him! That is what community is all about and every believer should want to be a part of that. So, we should be a part of God's church because it's a community of caring people, but finally,

C. God's Church is an Accountable Church. Jesus knows how weak we are and how prone we are to stumble and fall. Jesus knows that although we're supposed to be like California redwoods with strong and deep roots, we're more like Texas tumbleweeds with no roots, blowing around in the desert. So Jesus knew that we would need each other. He knew I would need you and you would need me, so He gave us the church body so we would be accountable to each other.

Some people would rather be a Lone Ranger Christian. But have you ever heard of a separate kidney or a separate arm functioning apart from the body? No; and neither can Christians work apart from the body of Christ. We are too connected by Jesus to be able to get along without each other in the church.

1 Cor. 12:12 (NIV) says, "*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many members, they form one body. So it is with Christ.*" Many parts, but one body. And that means God's church is an accountable church. I am accountable to you and you to me, but all to Christ.

Conclusion: This invitation today is for you to not only believe in Christ and be saved, but also to submit to baptism and to follow the Lord's example of obedience, and unite yourself with a caring community of accountable believers. It may also be an invitation to re-commit your life to Christ as Joshua did. It's a chance for Moms and Dads to say, "*as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*"

Listen to Joshua one more time: "*Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.*"