

August 11, 2019

Joshua 24:select

My friends, this is not a chair. It is a barb-wire fence. Let me say it again: this is not a chair. This isn't a place to set yourself; it isn't a place to straddle. These barbs don't massage; they don't tickle; they tear. Set yourself here, straddle the fence, and what happens? It hurts. It worse than hurts. It rips; it tears; it does the straddler damage. And yet what? People set themselves here like it's the right place to be. They know it hurts, but try to get them to move, and they won't. Sometimes they will fight you and fight themselves to stay planted on that fence, no matter how much it hurts. And other times, when they do try to move, trying to move off the fence hurts even more. So they settle themselves in - one leg on the right side of the fence, one leg on the wrong side of the fence.

Do you ever straddle the fence - one leg on the right side, the other leg on the wrong side? This past week I was riding that fence, and it hurt. After hours of work trying to pull some things together, one thing after another was pulling all that work apart. So I got on that fence, and I rode it. One leg on the right side of the fence - "I'm with Jesus." And one leg on the wrong side of the fence - "I'm frustrated and grumpy, and I want to be frustrated and grumpy." What made it worse was I know people who deal with worse, far worse, and are far, far more gracious. So I had one leg on the right side of the fence - I want to do right. And I had one leg on the other side of the fence, the wrong side. It hurt, but I felt a need to be grumpy. And then what? The Holy Spirit of God stuck my sermon in front of my face - "A lesson from the life of Joshua: Get off the fence!" It hurt some to move, but it feels a whole lot better to be off the fence than on the fence. Do you ever straddle the fence - one leg on the right side of the fence, the other leg on the wrong side? One part of you with God, another part of you fighting against God?

Our lesson is from the end of Joshua's life. He's gathered his people together to share his last words. He shares some family history; it's not all good. And then Joshua gets to his point: "Get off the fence." How did he put it? **"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. 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. [in other words, Get off the fence!] But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”**

It seems the people had one leg on the right side of the fence with God, and one leg on the wrong side. Maybe they weren't completely straddling the fence, with one leg completely on the wrong side of the fence. Maybe they were just keeping their options open in case God didn't come through for them like they hoped. Or maybe they were keeping their options open in case a better deal than God's deal came along. Either way, Joshua calls his people out: **“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.”** Did you hear those two small words in the middle? **“Choose for yourselves - this day - whom you will serve.”** And then Joshua calls his people to follow: **“As for me and my household we will serve the LORD.”**

Why “this day”? Here's one reason. Imagine this fence isn't just a barb wire fence. Imagine it's a charged fence, an electric fence. Every once in a while God sends a charge through the fence - what side will we jump to? God's side or the wrong side? And every once in a while God sends a lethal charge through the fence - time's up. We don't want to be straddling the fence when time is up. You know what I mean? But there's another reason to get off from straddling the fence. Life is a whole lot better standing on God's side of the fence than straddling the fence. Joshua knew that. So Joshua says: **“Choose for yourselves - this day - whom you will serve.”** And then he calls us to follow: **“As for me and my household we will serve the LORD.”**

What comes next is puzzling. The people answer: “We're with you! We'll serve the LORD.” Sounds good, doesn't it? But Joshua answers back: “No, you won't.” The people insist: “NO, we will serve the LORD.” But Joshua doesn't seem to buy it. He doesn't cheer them; he gets in their faces: **“You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD.”** What's up with that? I don't know. What seems clear, though, is that Joshua was looking for more than nice-sounding words. He calls for

more than words: **“Now then, throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”** In other words, “Get off the fence and follow the LORD.”

What would Joshua say to us today? ... to you today? In what part of your walk with God are you stuck straddling the fence? - one leg on the right side of the fence with God, one leg on the wrong side away from God? In other words, in what parts of your life are you straddling the fence with God and without God? What would Joshua say to that? What would Joshua look for from you? More than words, right?

Why? Because he knows what Jesus has for you, for us. You see, Jesus didn't straddle the fence, he didn't hedge his bets, he didn't keep his options open in case something better came along, something better than what God was offering. No, Jesus went all in with God. Jesus went all in for you. Jesus went all in even though it cost him his life. Instead of riding a fence hoping to play both sides, Jesus rode a cross rejected by both sides, rejected by God and rejected by the world. For you and me, he rode that cross, taking our place. He took our place for our wrong choices. He took our place for our straddling choices. He took our place for our half-hearted choices. For you and me, he took our place on the cross and gave us his place altogether right with God. For you, God isn't keeping his options open; no, for you, he says: “I choose you.” For you, God isn't playing “wait and see”; for you, he says: “I forgive you.” For you, God isn't hemming and hawing; no, for you, he calls: “Come with me and be blessed.”

Joshua knew what it is like to be blessed with God. And he knew what it is like to straddle the fence - he had seen it all too many times. So what does he say? **“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.”** And what do we do? We get off whatever fences we're set on, and we join Joshua: **“As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”** Amen.