

## Joshua 24:14-15 Famous Words .... Both First or Last!

Disclaimer: Material from this message was adapted in part from messages found on the Sermon Central website.

In 1519 Spanish explorer Cortez landed at Vera Cruz to begin his conquest of Mexico with only 700 men. Legend has it that before they set off into Mexico's interior Cortez ordered the ships to be burned while his men watched. Their only means of retreat sinking to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, there was now only one direction they could take. That's commitment!

On this Sunday when we celebrate one man's commitment, which set God's church once again on the path to reformation and revival, we need to ask ourselves what has become of this idea of **commitment**.

These days, the idea of making a lasting **commitment** seems mostly outdated. Take marriage for example. A comic strip had one man speaking to another saying, "*You know, it's odd, but now that I'm actually engaged I'm starting to feel nervous about getting married!*" The other man replied, "*I know what you mean. It's only natural to be nervous! Marriage is a big commitment. Seven or eight years can be a long time!*"

Marriages are no longer considered long-term commitments; no longer *until death do us part*. Rather it's until we no longer "*feel like it,*" because most marriages are now built more around **feelings than commitments**. Instead of working it out *for better or worse*, it's "*let's call it quits and go our separate ways; we can still be friends.*" Yeah right.

We live in a world where long-term commitments to a relationship are no longer wanted or desired; this is also true for occupations, locations, and even the church. Today people would rather keep their options open; they don't want to get to the end of the buffet line and find out they have no more room on their plates for the cake and ice cream. And because of this fear of commitment, they miss out on building a great life for themselves and for their family.

You see, when we make a commitment we're choosing how we're going to invest our lives, time, and resources, usually for the betterment of our lives and the lives of those we commit to. When we refuse to make life's most important commitment, which is having a demonstrable faith in Jesus Christ, we're missing out on not only the best life we could possibly live, but also one that will count for all eternity.

The sad reality is that a lot of young people in church today won't be seen in the next two to five years. Some will leave the community or join another church, but most won't be found in any church. One of the main reasons is that while they may have made some profession of faith in the past, they never committed their lives to God. They refused to burn the ships in the harbor.

But today's church problems are much deeper than just disappearing youth. I fear that most of our churches are filled with mostly casual Christians, who have the habit of church attendance but no real commitment to keep them here when conflicts arise or enthusiasm wanes.

**If we're ever going to see a spiritual revival in our churches and in our country then a lot more Christians will need to make a personal commitment much like the commitment Joshua made.**

Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord,  
choose this day whom you will serve ...  
but as for me and my household,  
we will serve the Lord.'  
Joshua 24:15

What is fascinating about what Joshua said, is that now at the end of his life he was simply reaffirming the same commitment to the Lord that he made early on. From his youth, Joshua was fully committed to God. As Moses' assistant he would stay at the tabernacle day and night and even at the risk of being stoned by a rebellious mob, Joshua the spy stood firm on God's promise that Israel could take the Promised Land. Because of his commitment, God honored Joshua by making him Israel's next leader after Moses with the responsibility of taking Israel into the Promised Land.

Now, that they were securely settled, Joshua once again calls for all of Israel to gather in assembly and after reviewing all of God's blessings, he challenges them to re-commit to God. Then he leads the way by reaffirming his own commitment, "**As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.**" (Joshua 24:15b). This wasn't some hidden decision where if things didn't work out he could quietly slip away with nobody knowing the difference, Joshua declared it loud and proud for all to hear and judge how they might respond.

As Christians when we came into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, we've made that same commitment. We said "yes" to Jesus, that we would follow Him, keep His word, and serve Him with our whole lives. So today, especially in these days, it would be a good day to join with Joshua in reaffirming our own commitment to God.

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So what does our commitment to God entail? What does it look like in real time?

Notice that Joshua's commitment involved two aspects. It began with a personal commitment, "**But as for me,**" and then a commitment to others, "**and my house.**"

Let's look at three major aspects of any commitment we make to God

## First, commitment begins with our will

Remember what Jesus prayed that final night as he knowingly faced arrest and certain death? *"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."* (Matthew 26:39)

From the start, when John the Baptist declared Him to be *the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*, Jesus understood the cost of commitment would be His entire life – even unto death (John 1:29). At the end of His life, He held true to His commitment, acceding to His Father's will and dying upon the cross, even while in His prayer He desired differently. Jesus gave up what He wanted and followed through with God's plan... and aren't we glad that He did, for we would not be here today and we would have no hope for tomorrow if He hadn't.

**Our will is the process by which we make decisions.** What Jesus did was to give over the authority to make His own decisions from what He wanted placing His life squarely into the Father's hands. He exchanged His wants and desires for the better plans of the Father's.

As believers in Jesus Christ, and therefore His followers, we need to understand the cost of this commitment as well. Jesus actually mentioned what that cost would be so there could be no confusion when it comes to our own commitment.

*If any want to become my followers,  
let them deny themselves,  
take up their cross daily and follow me.*

(Luke 9:23)

To take up your cross literally means to consider yourself dead to your desires and plans so that you might now live through the power of Christ's Spirit living in you. As we come before the Lord declaring ourselves to be followers of Jesus, God expects this same commitment from us. **"Not as I will, but as You will Lord; no longer will it be what I want, but rather what You decide is best for my life."**

**Yes making a commitment to God is an act of our willfully choosing His path over ours and then following His path for the entirety of our life.**

**But commitment claims more than our will, it also includes our resources.** The book of Proverbs teaches

*Honor the Lord with your substance  
and with the first fruits of all your produce;  
then your barns will be filled with plenty,  
and your vats will be bursting with wine.*

Proverbs 3:9-10

Israel was commanded to give God their first fruits, which not only meant the first of what they made, but also the best. And while we think this commitment only centers on our finances, it actually involves every area of our lives including our time, our talents, our energy, and our interests.

What commitment really boils down to is our motives. **In other words, what we give to God should all be coming from a heart that is totally in love with God, and this is just one of the ways we put this love into action.** When a couple is joined together in marriage, they vow to "*cleave to one another, becoming one flesh,*" this was intended to be a lifetime commitment. The same is true of our faith. Did you know that as a member of the church we are described as the "**bride of Christ**"? Our confession of faith is intended to be in essence our spiritual marriage to God our creator. So we honor our Lord and the life we now live together by placing both our will and our resources at His disposal to use for His glory.

**Third, commitment also entails our agendas.** If we go up a couple of verses in Proverbs we see how God views the use of our time.

Trust in the Lord with **all your heart**,  
and do not rely on your own insight.  
In **all your ways** acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Solomon says that we are to ***trust the Lord with all our hearts*** and not to rely upon our own understanding. In the Hebrew language this means *to cling to and lean upon*. So, what we're being told is that we need to cling to and lean upon the Lord with the whole of our being, basing our decisions upon God's, not our own take of the situations we are facing. The reason is simple, we're fallible beings fully capable of making mistakes. Therefore we need God's guidance if we're ever going to make it through this life victoriously.

We're also told to ***acknowledge God in all our ways***. To acknowledge in the Hebrew language doesn't mean to merely assent to His presence, but rather to get to know God in an intimate way. Such intimacy can only happen by spending time with God.

Someone once said that if we spent as much time with our spouses as we do with God, then the divorce rate would skyrocket. In the Bible, we're called the bride of Christ, not a distant relative. Therefore trusting God along with taking the time to personally know Him, will result in God getting intimately involved in our lives showing us the good and right path to take through this life.

It was this very thing of making God's agenda theirs that saw the first church grow so fast and dramatically.

*"Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people... And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.."* (Acts 2:46a, 47b)

The early church allowed the Lord's agenda to be theirs and God added daily to their number. When we follow God's agenda, doing church His way, then we'll see similar results in our own lives, in the lives of our family and in the life of the church.

***As for me, I will follow the Lord.*** This then is the first part of Joshua's commitment, that is, a personal commitment. But Joshua also made a commitment to relationships when he talked about his household.... ***And my house will follow the Lord***

The book of Acts makes an interesting reference to the first church saying, *"Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul."* (Acts 4:32)

Earlier we read that they spent much time together, *they were of one accord* (kjv), but now they are described as being *"of one heart and soul"* as well. What we see is that there is nothing like coming together in a church and putting our differences aside for the good of God's kingdom. Nothing substitutes for it! **Yet how often can this be said of a modern church?** The reason is that there are many barriers we can erect against making commitments to a church.

**1. Past Experiences** may get in the way of commitment. We may be afraid to make commitments because we've been hurt in the past.

- Maybe it was a bad relationship that now prevents us from getting close to anyone because we don't want to be hurt like that again.
- Maybe it was a bad experience in a church, therefore we never commit to any church.

Our past experiences, more often than not, sabotage future potential commitments. Therefore we need to stop allowing our past to determine our future. Our past can be used as a guide, but not as some dictatorial ruler.

**2. Selfishness** is another reason why some don't commit.

It is estimated that selfishness is the most common reason why marriages fail. If you say you love your spouse or your family and spend absolutely no time with them, then all you're doing is paying lip service to your commitment. Jesus said that we cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve our possessions and God at the same time. We cannot say we love God and at the same time commit ourselves to worldly pursuits.

This is not saying we cannot be successful at our jobs or careers, we cannot enjoy our sports or hobbies, but it is saying that in all we do, God needs to be our number one

priority. This is actually the first commandment, which is not having any other gods in front of or taking the place of the Lord God in our lives.

### **3. But lastly, Complacency is the main reason why commitments fail.**

Complacency kills commitments and prevents us from following God's call upon our lives.

One spring morning a flock of wild geese flew over a farm where a group of tame ducks floated in the pond. When these ducks heard the call of the geese it was like an arrow struck deep within them and they began to flap their wings. The only problem is that they never left the water. In their hearts the matter was settled, the corn of the barnyard was more tempting than the call of the wild. Their desire to fly with the wild geese made them momentarily uncomfortable because of their complacency.

I cannot tell you how many ministries have been thwarted or never realized because of this one thing.

God needs a church that is totally committed to Him. What that means is that we need to be 100 percent devoted to God, His word, way, and will. When this happens then we'll see what the early church saw.

Look at what that small handful of fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ did. They evangelized the entire world in a single generation. Look at what Martin Luther accomplished by stubbornly refusing to give up his commitment to honor God rather than the institutional church. Studies have confirmed that just 2 percent of a population can change the culture of an entire nation. **This is why we don't need a moral majority, but rather a committed minority who will live for Christ.**

It is good for us to know that after his personal stand, Israel repeated Joshua's commitment for them and kept that commitment for at least the next two generations, until the last of Joshua's leaders had also died and there was no one left to remind them.

Today is Reformation Sunday when we remember how one man's commitment to Biblical truth brought about a reformation within the entire church. This has happened before and has happened several times again with people like Saint Patrick, Saint Francis, and the Wesley brothers all bringing about major church revivals because they stood by their commitments to honor God in their lives, no matter what the world tried to throw at them.

Being a casual Christian is a contradiction in terms. It's like saying we're only partially pregnant. You either are or you're not. Jesus wrote to the church in Laodicea, that He wished they would either be "cold or hot," because they were neither, because they were only lukewarm, this made Him sick to His stomach (Revelation 3:15-17). As a Church in

another age desperately needing revival and reform, we need to take Christ's concerns to heart.

Bill Rutledge concluded his sermon – two weeks ago – saying that as a church who is trying to thrive in an age of religious complacency, we are saying to the world, “**look at us!**” Check out our authenticity, take the pulse of our spiritual life. **When they look, what will they see?** Will they see, just another church going through the motions, or one filled with committed Christians who are alive with the power of the Holy Spirit.

The prayer of the session, the prayer of your pastors, hopefully your prayer as well, is that this church might once again in heart, mind, and soul, become like the first church that boldly lived out and carried the love of Jesus to a desperately lost world

Today, on this Reformation Sunday, please summon up the courage of Joshua and make your commitment, or to recommit, to fully following Jesus. Who knows what kind of a revival might follow; God knows! Let's pray about this.