

Anthology | Learning to Love the Stories of God

Week 5: Covenant Renewal (Joshua 24:1-28)

Read the story:

When?

This story is in the era of Redeemed to Worship. This is after God's people have taken control of the Promised Land and distributed the land to the tribes of Israel. It is right before Joshua dies. This is his final address to the people.

Who?

Joshua is addressing all the tribes and leaders of Israel. He also lists a genealogy of Israel including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Moses and Aaron. Joshua also lists Israel's enemies that the Lord has overcome: Egypt, Balak, Baalam, the leaders of Jericho, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Gergashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Where?

The address occurs in Shechem. Shechem has significance as it was the first place Abraham settled into Canaan, where God appeared to Abraham (Genesis 12:6-7), and was near to where the people had first renewed their covenant with God after first coming into Canaan (Joshua 8:30).

Summarize the story:

Joshua calls all the tribes of Israel to speak to them and talk to them about their history: specifically about where they came from (starting with Abraham), what they have been through, and about God's faithfulness in all of it: God called them out of Egypt, sustained them in the wilderness and gave the Israelites victory over their enemies (who frequently outmatched them). The Israelites did none of this apart from the Lord.

In light of that, Joshua calls Israel to fear and serve the Lord, to put away all false gods and to choose who they will serve. The people recognize the Lord's faithfulness and say they will serve the Lord. Then in a surprise move, Joshua says they aren't able to serve the God because He's holy and their sinfulness is going to mess it up and that when they forsake God, He will turn against them.

Again, the people said "No, but we will serve the Lord" and Joshua says their words will be a witness against them - that they have made their choice. Joshua makes a covenant with the people and gives them rules for them to help them. He sets up a stone of remembrance, as a reminder of Israel's choice and as a witness against them if they forsake God for false gods.

Leader Notes: This is another one of the times that the Old Testament points us to Jesus in an indirect way. Instead of putting someone in the story who is a lot like Jesus, sometimes the Old Testament sets up a theological problem that no one in the story can solve. The people want to follow God but Joshua says they can't do it. Because God's holy and they're sinners. It's an irreconcilable theological dilemma. And that's the point. The only one who can reconcile the dilemma is Jesus when God brings the narrative to where it's ultimately leading in the cross.

Analyze the story:

Attributes of God displayed:

- God is faithful. (He remembers His covenant.)
- God is a protector. (He saves His people from their enemies.)
- God is our sustainer. (He sustains and leads His people in the wilderness.)
- God is holy. (He cannot have unholiness in his presence.)

- God is jealous for their affections. (He wants his people to serve Him and Him alone.)
- God is just. (He cannot just wipe away sin without someone paying the penalty.)
- God is to be feared. (He is powerful, just, and holy)
- God hates idolatry. (He will punish the people for their transgressions)
- God is a loving Father. (He's pursuing them as He's working through Joshua to warn God's people of the horrible consequences of bad decisions.)

Who is who in the story? (Who is like us? Who is like Christ?)

- We are like the Israelites in that we want to serve God even though we aren't able to do so fully.
- We are like the Israelites in that we wrongly think we can serve God without failing, but then we fail anyway.
- We are like the people in that we greatly underestimate our rebellion and need for a Savior.
- We are called to be like Joshua in reminding ourselves and God's people of His character and our need for a Savior

- Jesus is like Joshua because He points out our need for repentance.
- Jesus is like Joshua because He calls us to incline our hearts to God.

Connect the story:

Parallel Statements:

- We are saved by the Lord as a gift despite our sin and not by our works.
- God is faithful to save His sinful people despite His justice that can't abide sin.
- We cannot uphold God's laws and therefore we need a Savior named Jesus.
- God punishes sin and therefore we need a Savior named Jesus.
- We are guilty of committing idolatry and therefore we need a Savior named Jesus.
- Jesus took our guilt and punishment and covenant-breaking upon Himself.
- We only obey because we've been saved.

Apply the story:

- Growing in knowledge of our family history as God's people helps us to remember His faithfulness despite our sinfulness through all generations.
- We are called to actively choose to serve Christ and to choose covenant with Christ as our only God that we will worship.
- We are called to watch out for idolatry and to be self-aware of who we are worshipping/serving.
- Pray for God's help in inclining our hearts away from sin and towards Him.
- Take sin seriously. Don't minimize it. Don't justify it. Don't hide it. Put it to death.

Who needs this story?

Leader Notes:

- Self-righteous people: we are unable to remain faithful through our own efforts.
- Hopeless people: we have one who intercedes for us!
- People who have no desire to fight sin: God hates sin and calls us to fight it.
- People who feel defeated in their fight against sin: God has saved us from His own wrath and graciously gives us a way to be reconciled despite our sinfulness.
- Those that don't remember the gospel: We are more sinful than we ever dreamed and more forgiven than we ever imagined.
- People who feel they are too dirty to be saved: we aren't saved through our own efforts.
- People who don't pray or rely on God: we aren't saved through our own efforts.