

Choose This Day Whom You Will Serve, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 25051106  
Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25 and Matthew 25:1-13  
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 6 November, 2005

There must have been thousands of souls seated before him. They were gathered in Shechem in the valley between the hills. They were all the Israelites, all of the tribes descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Joshua began speaking to them for God: “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel...”

He reminded them of their long history as God’s people. “I took your father Abraham and led him through the land of Canaan and made his offspring many.

“I brought you out of slavery in Egypt with Moses and Aaron.

“I saved you from Pharaoh’s army at the Reed Sea.

“I brought you through the wilderness.

“I handed your enemies over to you.

“I gave you a land, towns, vineyards and oliveyards that you did not plant.”

Chapter twenty-four of Joshua is one of those great chapters of the Bible, significant in the development of our faith.

Joshua then spoke in his own voice. “Now, therefore, revere the Lord and serve him in sincerity and faithfulness. Put away the gods that your ancestors served and serve the Lord. Now, if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve.”

Choose this day whom you will serve. Will you serve God, or will you serve your financial wealth? Will you serve God, or will you serve your boss? Will you serve God, or will you serve the crowd around you?

The Israelites, eagerly listening to Joshua, yelled back, “We’ll serve God too!”

Joshua warned them. “You can’t worship God, because God is a jealous god.” In other words, if you make a choice, you had better stick with it. There is no turning back!

Choose this day whom you will serve. Will you kill your enemy or will you love your enemy? Will you make disciples or will you make bombs?

God demands justice. If you choose God, it means choosing justice.

In 1990, the average large company CEO made one-hundred-seven times the pay of the average production worker. In 2003, the average CEO made 301 times the pay of a worker. In 2004, the average CEO made 431 times the pay of the average production worker.<sup>1</sup> If the minimum wage had risen as fast as CEO pay since 1990, the lowest paid workers in the US would be earning \$23.03 an hour today, not \$5.15 an hour.

Is God pleased that we pay such meager wages to those entrusted to the care of our children, and elderly and to teachers? In the last ten years the gap between teachers and other white-collar professional workers like accountants, buyers, attorneys, and engineers has widened.<sup>2</sup> Is this just?

Choose this day whom you will serve! Joshua said, “As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”<sup>3</sup> He knew how much God had done for him and for all the Israelites.

How much has God done for you? Do you claim all the credit for where you are in life? For

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<sup>1</sup>*Executive Excess 2005, 12<sup>th</sup> Annual CEO Compensation Survey* produced by the Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, DC and United for a Fair Economy, Boston, MA

<sup>2</sup>American Federation of Teachers 2004 Salary Study

<sup>3</sup>Joshua 24:15

your health? For your home and wealth? How do you show your gratitude to God?

Choose this day whom you will serve. We need to be honest with each other and we need to be honest with God. Dr. Pierce Harris of First Methodist Church in Atlanta caused quite a stir when he posted the giving of each family in the congregation on the bulletin board. The controversy was led by one particular member, one of the wealthiest in the church. Everybody knew this man got a new Cadillac every year and was a man of considerable means. What got his goat was the fact that his fellow church members *found out* how little he gave. It became more embarrassing because a waitress who worked all night in a diner in Atlanta and cared for a paraplegic husband had given more to First Methodist Church during the year than he had.

You can breathe a sigh relief. I am not proposing we publicize what you give to the church, but you can see what it means to choose between God and personal gain.

Choose this day whom you will serve. It is easy for people in our culture to worship money and power. The advertisements, the glamor, the noise all lead us to worship things other than God, and we amass personal wealth as though that's all there is to life. We sacrifice our children and we sacrifice personal relationships to gain more and more. Yet, in all my years of ministry, I still have never seen an armored car following along in a funeral procession to the grave.

This week, you have an opportunity to choose God. You will be asked to make an estimate of giving to Elon Community Church for next year. Will you choose to support the hiring of a part time Christian Education coordinator for this congregation? Will you choose to support the hiring of a youth worker to spend time working with our young people? Will you choose to support evangelism through better advertising and marketing of this congregation which stands for God's justice and extravagant welcome? Or, will you choose that this church continues to just muddle along with budget deficits, hesitation, and fear of the future? Your choice for God will be reflected in what you choose to give in support of this church.

As we come to the communion table this morning, we gather in the presence of the saints—those who have gone before us. They are the ones who in past years chose God. They are the ones who have brought the good news of God's love to our ears. They are the ones who have provided us with this church.

What will we provide for our children and for the coming generations?

Choose this day whom you will serve!