

Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25

Heroes & Heroines of the Faith: Joshua

“The Bigger Picture”

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Rev. Lou Nyiri

What is your life motto? What do you believe? What guides you?

Is it something along these lines...

- *You’ve got to stand for something or you’ll fall for anything.*
- *No matter where you go...there you are.*
- *Always follow the golden rule. (I once heard someone say the golden rule meant the person with the most gold gets to make the rules.)*
- *Begin with the end in mind.*

Sayings like these are what life coaches and time management gurus might classify under the heading of personal leadership.

They are vision & destination statements which ground us in clear understandings of our destination (where we want to end up).

They also provide us with a way gauge where we are now, where we’re going and what we value most.

They help us to see the bigger picture, so that, when we get to the end of our lives, having climbed the “ladder of success” we can peer out and see the good news before us. These vision & destination statements also help make sure that the wall against which we lean our ladder is the right wall. None of us wants to reach the end of our lives to look out over the horizon before us and realize then we’ve been going in the wrong direction.

The people I know who seem to know who they are and where they’re headed in life have figured out their vision/destination statements early on in their lives.

Our sermon series continues today with Joshua’s story - Joshua was a bigger picture kind of guy. Our text today comes at the end of his life. It shows he knew where he wanted to end up and he continually reminded himself (and those around him) of the ultimate destination – the promised land – more importantly, he reminded himself (and those around him) who is with them along the way.

At critical junctures in their story, Joshua or God, exhorted the people to remain faithful to God. To make sure their ladder leaned against the proper wall & they saw the bigger picture.

For instance, Joshua’s commission to lead the Israelite people into the promised land began with these words back in chapter 1:1-9...

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying, ² “My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. ⁴ From the

wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. ⁵ No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. ***As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.*** ⁶ ***Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them.*** ⁷ ***Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you;*** do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. ⁹ ***I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.***

AS they stood poised to enter the land, here are the words spoken in Joshua 3: 7-10...

⁷ ***The Lord said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses."*** ⁸ ***You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, "When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan."*** ⁹ ***Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the Lord your God."*** ¹⁰ ***Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites:***

-And, as Max Lucado is fond of saying, even the mosquito-bites...-

As the Eastern Tribes began to return to their territory, here are Joshua's words in chapter 22:1-6...

Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, ² ***and said to them, "You have observed all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, and have obeyed me in all that I have commanded you;*** ³ ***you have not forsaken your kindred these many days, down to this day, but have been careful to keep the charge of the Lord your God.*** ⁴ ***And now the Lord your God has given rest to your kindred, as he promised them; therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan.*** ⁵ ***Take good care to observe the commandment and instruction that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to keep his commandments, and to hold fast to him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul."*** ⁶ ***So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.***

Then in Joshua 23: 1-16...

23 A long time afterward, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies all around, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, - I'm going to start using that phrase – 'I'm not old...I'm well advanced in years'

² ***Joshua summoned all Israel, their elders and heads, their judges and officers, and said to them, "I am now old and well advanced in years;*** ³ ***and you have seen all that the Lord your***

God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the Lord your God who has fought for you. ⁴ I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. ⁵ The Lord your God will push them back before you, and drive them out of your sight; and you shall possess their land, as the Lord your God promised you. ⁶ Therefore be very steadfast to observe and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right nor to the left, ⁷ so that you may not be mixed with these nations left here among you, or make mention of the names of their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or bow yourselves down to them, ⁸ ***but hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day.*** ⁹ For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations; and as for you, no one has been able to withstand you to this day. ¹⁰ One of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, as he promised you. ¹¹ ***Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God.*** ¹² ***For if you turn back, and join the survivors of these nations left here among you, and intermarry with them, so that you marry their women and they yours,*** ¹³ ***know assuredly that the Lord your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you;***

- Joshua reminds how easy it can be to fall back into old patterns of living.-

but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge on your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land that the Lord your God has given you.

¹⁴ “And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one thing has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you; all have come to pass for you, not one of them has failed. ¹⁵ But just as all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the bad things, until he has destroyed you from this good land that the Lord your God has given you. ¹⁶ If you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which he enjoined on you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land that he has given to you.”

And finally, our text from this morning, Joshua 24...

¹⁴ ***“Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.*** ¹⁵ ***Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region 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.”***

¹⁶ Then the people answered, ***“Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; ¹⁷ for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; ¹⁸ and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”***

¹⁹ But Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.” ²¹ And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the Lord!” ²² Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” ²³ He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” ²⁴ The people said to Joshua, “The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey.” ²⁵ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

With that, Joshua sent the people away to their inheritance and dies at the age of 110. And in verse 31, it declares, “Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel.”

Begin with the end in mind.

Know who you serve and who it is that travels alongside you.

What do you want to be known for – in this life & in the life others will tell about you long after you’re gone.

What’s your bigger picture?

Joshua put this same challenge before the people of Israel.

He was asking, “What kind of people will we be, and to whom will we commit ourselves?”

The way we answer that question shows a watching world what it is we value.

As disciples – Christ Followers – we have an obligation to decide how our Christian faith will be lived out daily – from our homes, to our neighborhoods, workplaces, even while awaiting a parking place while on an errand.

Does the way we live our lives declare that we have an allegiance to Jesus the Christ?

Do our lives resemble a mini-series of self-serving choices or life-giving ministries?

A postal worker in Ohio takes the time to know the individuals along his route.

He notices and listens to shut-ins.

He aided recent immigrants by finding ESL tutors.

He had lists of local agencies to refer to and was able to help battered women get out of abusive relationships.

He learned that a business on his route needed an administrative assistant and that around the corner an individual needed a job and he put the two in conversation.

Self-serving choices see life as you give something to get something.

Life-giving ministries see life as returning something that has already been given to you.

Self-serving choices depend on our abilities.

Life-giving ministries depend on our availability to God.

In the end, it depends on choice.

Choose this day whom you will serve...We know how Joshua answered it.

How will we?

And, I don't know about you, but I need to get to figuring that out pretty soon, because unlike Joshua, I don't plan on sticking around to 110.

Amen.