

# Called to be Servants

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[ 0 : 00 ] Very helpful indeed. But we're going to read now in the Bibles, and as this morning, we're in the book of Joshua. And now we come to the very last chapter of Joshua, Joshua chapter 24.

If you have one of the church visitors' Bibles, I think that is page, what is it, 198. And you can follow along in those Bibles. And we're going to read most of this last chapter of Joshua, chapter 24, verse 1. Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God.

And Joshua said to all the people, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Long ago your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor, and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the river and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac. And to Isaac, I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hell country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. And I sent Moses and Aaron. And I plagues Egypt with what I did in the midst of it.

And afterward, I brought you out. Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea. And the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea.

And when they cried to the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them. And your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness a long time. Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived on the other side of the Jordan.

[ 2 : 04 ] They fought with you, and I gave them into your hand. And you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. Then Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel. And he sent and invited Balaam, the son of Baor, to curse you. But I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand. And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the leaders of Jericho fought against you. And also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Gergazites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

And I gave them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites. It was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities that you had not built, and you dwelled in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant. Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your father served beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord. And if it's evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your father served in the regions beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Then the people answered, Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods. For it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the peoples through whom we passed. 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.

But Joshua said to the people, You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He's a jealous God. He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. 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.

And the people said to Joshua, No, but we will serve the Lord. And Joshua said to the people, You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord to serve him.

[ 4 : 59 ] And they said, We are witnesses. He said, Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel.

And the people said to Joshua, The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem.

And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.

And Joshua said to all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us. Therefore, it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.

And so Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance. And after these things, Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being 110 years old.

[ 6 : 08 ] And they buried him in his own inheritance at Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountains of Gash. 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.

Amen. And may God bless to us this reading of his word. Well, with that as our prayer, let's turn again to the book of Joshua and to the 24th chapter, as we think about our theme this evening, called To Be Servants.

And as you're turning in the Bible to that passage, let me again say thank you for your welcome today and for the privilege of sharing this Sunday with you. It's been a real joy to Heather and me to be here.

Transition times are marker posts in our personal history. And we can all look back on particular turning points.

For example, leaving school or graduating from college or getting that first job or getting married or maybe the birth of the first child in our family or maybe moving house from one city to another or retiring from fully paid occupation.

[ 7 : 46 ] All of these are turning points in our lives. They all require adjustment. They all require us to, of course, be the same person and to live the same lives that we've been living, but in different ways, at different paces, in different relationships.

And these significant events always encourage us to look back and to look forward, to take stock, to think about the lessons we've learned, to set our sights on what is ahead of us and to be thinking through our priorities in a fresh way.

Now, as we come to the end of the book of Joshua, we're in that kind of territory and we find that much of this final chapter, as Joshua addresses the whole nation, is a sort of state-of-the-nation address in which he calls the people of Israel to a significant moment of reassessment, of renewed decision in the light of the past and as a direction for the future.

And so I think justly the famous verse in this chapter, which if you want a key verse for this evening, is the 15th verse. If it is evil in your sight to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served or the gods of the Amorites.

But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Now, the setting is highly significant and it shapes the whole event.

[ 9 : 24 ] Verse 1 tells us, Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem. And the name Shechem pulsates with significance in the Old Testament.

This is where God first appeared to Abraham, promised him the land, and promised that his descendants would inhabit it, way back in Genesis chapter 12.

And there Abraham built an altar in faith, believing God's promise, and committing himself to God's service. Shechem was where it all started.

Shechem was where Jacob bought a piece of land from the sons of Hamor and built an altar in the name of the God of Israel, Genesis 33. He, in his generation, the grandson of Abraham, believed the promise.

And as God gave him the 12 sons of Jacob, who became the 12 tribes of Israel, that promise began to be fulfilled. Shechem was the place where the altar was built.

[ 10 : 29 ] And here in the book of Joshua, Shechem is the place where the covenant commitment of Israel to the Lord their God is signed and sealed under Joshua's leadership back in chapter 8.

God's promises have at last been fulfilled. They are now in the land that he's promised. And Joshua takes them to Shechem, which is in the shadow of Mount Ebal in the north and Mount Gerizim to the south.

And there he proclaims the covenant of the Lord. And the people affirm that Yahweh, Jehovah, is our God. So it's a very strategic moment at the end of the book of Joshua, as they look back on all that God has done for them, that the nation is summoned to this very place where he first made them his people.

Since then, the land has been conquered, or a large part of it. It's certainly all been distributed to the tribal inheritances. Much of it remains to be possessed, as Joshua has told them.

But the land has been given rest by the Lord, and so his people are summoned formally to present themselves, verse 1, before God as living proof that not one word has failed of all the good things he promised.

[ 11 : 55 ] Shechem is the place of covenant. And a covenant is that which God makes with his people according to his own sovereign grace as he promises to bless them, to pour out his mercy upon them.

And as the people affirm, in response to that grace, that the Lord, he is God. So this is where all that God has done for his people is to be matched by their loving, wholehearted devotion to him as they finally take possession of the land.

And that's why at the end of our chapter, as you will remember in the reading, in verse 25, we find that Joshua made a covenant with the people that day. It's not a new covenant, it's the making of the covenant, which is already given through Moses at Sinai and rehearsed again at Shechem earlier in the book.

But here there is a formal acceptance. It's as though they're signing their signature on the contract. And the shape of the chapter reflects the contemporary form of treaties which were made between kings and their people.

And many scholars have pointed out that this is like an ancient Near Eastern treaty between a conquering king and the people of God. But our interest is not antiquarian.

[ 13 : 12 ] For us as 21st century Christians, this is the living and enduring word of God. And it is full of encouragement and challenge to us as we, in our generation, having received the promises which God first made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and brought to its fulfillment in Joshua being given the land.

As those promises went on and on in the Old Testament until the Lord Jesus came as the fulfillment of them all. We, as the New Testament people of God, look back and see God's hand in shaping us as well as shaping them.

You see, the Old Testament is not, as I say, a book of antiquarian interest. The Old Testament is the living and enduring word of God in which God declares himself to his people.

Whenever you come to a narrative book like Joshua, the big question to ask is what is God teaching us about God here? This is God's book about God before it's God's book about us.

We are very self-centered in our generation and we want to put ourselves into the story and we want it to be about me. But the way to study the Bible is to say, no, it isn't about me first of all.

There'll be lots there that I need to know.

[ 14 : 23 ] But it's God revealing God to me. And the first thing that Joshua does is to show them that the past is defined by the grace of God.

And I hope it struck you as we read that chapter how in this summary of Old Testament history up to the moment of Joshua's commissioning of the people, he constantly is referring them to the grace of God, the undeserved mercy and favor of God, which has paved the way for them all the way through their history as a people.

Their past is defined by grace. And that is true of us because when Paul wrote to the Galatians, he said that the promises that were made to Abraham have come to us, Christians, Gentiles, and Jewish believers.

And that through the gift of the Holy Spirit, those promises are applied in our lives. So the God who did these things for Israel is our God. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the unchanging, Trinitarian God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Lord, the I am who I am. And in that repository of his covenant faithfulness lie all the blessings that he's poured into our lives and is yet to give us as we go forward with him.

[ 15 : 41 ] Now, it's all about God's grace. Just look at all those first person singular verbs as Joshua speaks for God. Verse 3, I took your father Abraham from beyond the river.

Verse 4, to Isaac, I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the hill country. Verse 5, I sent Moses and Aaron. I plagued Egypt.

Verse 6, I brought your fathers out. Verse 8, I brought you into the land of the Amorites. Again and again, you see, God is saying, I did it.

I did it. Verse 10, I delivered you from the curses of Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. And so it goes on. Their entire history is the story of God's overflowing mercy and grace.

Now, Joshua tells it in four episodes. In verses 2 to 4, the story begins with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And here, the significant phrase is at the end of verse 2, they served other gods.

[16:46] That's where they started. At best, the worship of Abraham's family was mixed. And there, as he was in Ur of the Euphrates, in modern Iraq, as we would now call it, the memory of the one true and living God, which has been handed down from the time of Adam, was growing dim.

And then God broke into Abraham's life. And he moved him from his settled existence in Ur to become a nomad, led by God's direction through the whole land, which his descendants now possess.

So God, in his mercy, called Abraham. And in verse 3, we're told, then I took your father Abraham from beyond the river and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many.

I gave him Isaac. There you have the story of Genesis 12 to Genesis 21 in one verse. There was the promise of the land, the promise of the nation.

But as so often with God's promises, it seemed as though they would never be fulfilled. That's how he grows, our faith and our dependence on him. But no, God did give him his son Isaac eventually after many years.

[18:07] And then Isaac was the father of Esau and Jacob. And Esau has a land, but Jacob's sons have none. Only a long stay in Egypt when it looked as though they would never inherit the land that God had promised them where all their circumstances seemed to deny their destiny.

But where God's grace was secretly and silently at work all the time waiting for the iniquity of the Amorites to be complete as Genesis 15 predicted. And then in God's timing suddenly, verse 5, I sent Moses and Aaron and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it.

And I brought you out. If you have nine chapters of Genesis in verse 3, you have 12 chapters of Exodus in verse 5. I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it and afterward I brought you out. And then verse 6 recalls the crossing of the Red Sea but with a dramatic shift of focus. Did you notice in the reading how suddenly the past is moved into the present and he begins to address his hearers as you.

I brought you out. Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt and you came to the sea and the Egyptians pursued your fathers and when they cried to the Lord he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt.

[19:40] That's because some very old people in the congregation who are listening to him were there as little ones when God brought them out of Egypt and here they are decades later and some of those little ones who were under the age of 20 remember all those who were over the age of 20 failed to enter the land because of their unbelief but the little ones grew up and they entered the land and their children were there with them and so he can say you because you are the descendants you are the ones who have received this promise and you have experienced the fullness of it in the deliverance from Egypt and in the entry into the promised land so Joshua's hearers are now at the heart of the story and he reminds them of the third act of God's grace in verses 8 to 10 as he brought them to the land of the Amorites who lived on the east of the Jordan where they conquered where they fought against King of Og and Bashan and where he gave them into your hands and you took possession of their land Balak the king tried to curse them the Moabite king he hired a prophet

Balaam and you remember Balaam was unable to curse them out of his mouth could only come blessing their past is defined by the grace of God all the way through and then the story is brought right up to date verse 11 with all the victories of the conquest which you've witnessed in this book if you've read the book of Joshua you went over the Jordan you came to Jericho Jericho fell I gave them into your hand and he says in verse 12 I sent the hornet before you this has caused some problems with the commentators because was it literally a plague of hornets there's nothing in the narrative to suggest that I think it's probably a metaphor for the panic which was caused when God's people appeared at the Jordan cross the Jordan when Jericho fell if you read the opening

chapters of Joshua you'll find that several times we're told that the hearts of the pagan peoples sank within them they were terrified because they saw the power of God delivering his people from Egypt bringing them to the Jordan and enabling them to cross it miraculously and then Jericho falling and eventually Ai and other cities and the hornet is an image of God's creative ability to sow terror and panic among his enemies and to bring his people through into the fulfillment of everything that he had promised them I was the one who drove them out he said and look at the end of verse 12 it was not by your sword or by your bow now I wonder if we have forgotten that in our own experience I wonder if as Christians we become a bit used to it all a bit complacent we sort of think well God blesses me but then he ought to oughtn't he because I do my bit and I'm fulfilling my obligations towards him so of course I should be blessed instead of realizing that were it not for the grace of God not one of us would be here for one moment it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed it is of the

Lord's kindness and grace that he cares for people like us the great Scottish preacher Robert Murray McShane is on record isn't he of saying when he was asked the question what is the greatest wonder in all the world that he said is it the wonder of creation no is it the wonder of salvation well that is a great wonder but not even that he said I think the greatest wonder in all the world is that God goes on bothering with a man like me now there's a man whose heart is touched by God's grace that God goes on bothering with a man like me our past is defined by the grace of God totally undeserved completely unmerited but our God is a God who makes and keeps his promises and there is no difference in the character of grace or the overflowing benefits to us in the new covenant God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus we've been chosen in him we've been adopted into his family we've been redeemed by his precious blood we've been forgiven all our sins the knowledge of God has been given to us in the person of Jesus Christ and in him the inheritance to the eternal kingdom they are all only the product of God's grace in the gospel that's never forget that we contribute nothing to them we can add nothing to them we are people of undeserved mercy from start to finish and it is grace that defines us but then grace also has demands in the present verse 14 now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness covenant obligations always follow covenant privileges that's the ancient treaty format this is what I have done for you this is how you must live in the light of it and we get very used to that in everyday life rights carry with them equivalent responsibilities and we have to be encouraged to fulfill those responsibilities my first job after college was school mastering in a traditional south coast grammar school in

England boys only grammar school from 11 to 18 everybody dressed in school uniform and the headmaster used to regularly say things like this because the boys were all in uniform and they were easily identifiable in the town he would say boys of this school do not eat on the buses or chew gum on the buses or behave in a noisy manner in public why did he say that because they did it was very embarrassing when people phoned in the school and said some of your boys were misbehaving on the bus going home what he was trying to do was to impress on them the demands of privilege he was saying to them you are privileged to be educated in this splendid school now we expect from you an equivalent response they probably didn't really feel the privilege and so they weren't interested in the response but that's what's happening here you see Joshua is saying now in the light of all this the covenant obligations follow fear the Lord serve him put away the other gods and serve the Lord and

[ 26 : 36 ] Joshua is addressing the people on the basis of what God has just said to them he's expounding and applying those opening verses in a very practical way now to fear the Lord is the underlying attribute or attitude rather or motivation of the believer towards God it's not a craven terror but it is the recognition that God is God that he is awesome that I am utterly dependent upon his grace otherwise his holiness would consume me and therefore my position before him is one of reverent awe and submission it's the attitude of the redeemed forgiven sinner before a holy God a proper awe and reverence which submits the whole of this life to God and to his authority that is the inner response of the heart and when it happens it will be evidenced by the outer response of the life which is there in verse 14 fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness that is to say with integrity the Hebrew word means completeness or fullness and truthfulness grace so that there is a unity of heart and life there is an appropriate response to this God who is so faithful to us that I give my life to his service do you remember how

Paul addressed the Romans in chapter 12 of his great letter brothers I beseech you by the mercies of God that is remembering that your life is utterly dependent on his grace I beseech you by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God that is your reasonable service that is your spiritual worship that is why God has redeemed you that you might love him and serve him with integrity with a whole heart that is why the Lord Jesus said to his disciples if you love me keep my commandments and every time we fail to keep his commandments or we decide to break them it's because we don't love him we don't think he really cares for us we don't think he really knows best for us we think we know better and so our hearts become divided between him as God and me as God and there develops this conflict within in which single-mindedness disappears wholeheartedness begins to be eroded and I begin to compromise with my will overriding his will you see God gives to us not just commands but promises here Joshua has reminded them of how the promises has been fulfilled and he says now if you've seen that happening and you really take stock on that and you say well then this God has been faithful to me there is only one possible response and that is to be obedient to him and to submit my life to him I think it's quite a step forward in our Christian experience when we begin to understand that the reason we don't obey the commands is because we don't really believe the promises if we believe the promises we shall obey the commands see when God said to Abraham leave er and go to the land that I will show you he gave him a command leave er didn't give him a map he didn't tell him where he was going except it was to the land that I will show you that's a promise but because Abraham believed the promise he obeyed the command he would never have left er if he hadn't had the promise to the land that I will show you but because he trusted the promise and trusted the God of the promise he was prepared to leave the security of er and to start on the great journey that is the beginning of the story of Israel now that's the same with us you see serving the Lord is a matter of so believing the promises that we are prepared to commit our whole lives to him that is the only proper response to the whole hearted commitment of God to us in the person of his beloved son but as he challenges them to do that let's go to our central verse 15 if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord now why should that be here are people who are gathered in God's name as God's people why would it be evil to serve the Lord well because there's something within every one of us that says is it really the best thing to do does he really have my best interests at heart do I really want to venture out on God's promises and trust him when I can't see maybe that's not the best way doesn't necessarily mean it's evil in a moral sense at all that they're thinking but it means it's not to our advantage it's not what we want it doesn't seem to be the right thing for us and that is the challenge that we all face isn't it am I really prepared to God give God control oh yes theoretically but what about in your marriage what about in your family life you really prepared to live by the word of God there Bible's full of instruction isn't it about how to live as married couples and as fathers and mothers and children in families am I really prepared to trust him and to serve him in that or do I look to my spouse to give me what only God can give me or do I try to control my family so that they fulfill my ambitions for them it's a real challenge isn't it am I willing to put my career into God's hands to be content for him to guide me to govern my time and my priorities so that I'm not consumed by my work idol by the status I have or by the money I earn or by the power I exercise am I willing to put my future in God's hands and say well primarily I'm serving him not serving the company or the firm or myself am I prepared to trust him for whether I marry and if so whom I marry am I prepared to ask him to give me his wisdom about where I live and how I use my resources and what my priority should be in my use of money or time or skills and gifts am I prepared to put my Christian service at the heart of my life because I'm putting my life in his hands because he's bought me through the precious blood of Jesus with a price that I could never pay that blood of the Lamb of God without spot or blemish if I really understand that message and know how dependent on the grace of God I am then to say what can I do to serve the Lord in my daily life that is going to be the way forward isn't it that doesn't mean that I have to be in full-time ministry or I have to be in missionary work we're all in ministry and we're all sharing the gospel by the lives we live it doesn't mean that we've got to be in some sort of paid capacity of Christian service but it does mean that wherever you are at 11 o'clock tomorrow morning you're the servant of the Lord before you're the servant of anybody else and that your life is in his hands and that you are asking him to use you in that context because that's where he's placed you but they're real challenges aren't they really to trust God now nobody else can write your script for you but be assured that every day you are writing your own script by a hundred different choices that you make so choose this day says

Joshua whom you will serve because what he's saying is you'll serve somebody that's the way we were made we are creatures and if we don't serve the creator we'll serve the created we'll worship the things he's made we'll worship the things in his world we'll worship ourselves primarily if we don't worship him we're all created to serve the question is whom are we going to serve choose this day but as for me in my house he says we'll serve the Lord we're not going to have anything to do with those gods which their fathers served beyond the river so there was still some of those old Euphrates gods knocking around in Israel's experience all the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell they'd taken some of the Canaanite images and perhaps even had them in their kit bags that day those little statues those little images of pagan religion get rid of it he says serve the Lord because there is only one

[ 35 : 56 ] God and he is the God of limitless grace who's made you his people so as we close let's remind ourselves then in the last part of the chapter that if the past is defined by grace and if the present demands are based on grace then the future is dependent on grace because as the people hear the challenge they respond so encouragingly don't they then the people answered far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods verse 17 for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt the Lord drove out the peoples before us end of verse 18 therefore we also will serve the Lord for he is our God he's not only your God Joshua it's not just you and your house we're with you we're going to serve the Lord and the response of verse 19 is a staggering comfort because Joshua says to them you can't do it you can't do it you are not able to serve the Lord what's going on here see whenever you meet a surprise like that in the Bible it always opens up some new understanding doesn't it is he playing games with them why does he now turn the tables at the very point when they say they will serve the Lord he turns around and says it's impossible well the answer is in the rest of the verse because God is holy and God is jealous that is God is set apart from all other gods and from his covenant people by his righteousness and by his moral purity in him is no darkness at all and that is why he will not share his devotion with any other gods he is jealous as the faithful partner in a marriage who loves their spouse so much and so faithfully that such undivided love is the only appropriate response in return Joshua's response underlines the absolute and awesome nature of this God of grace in his holiness and his jealousy it is not a light thing to surrender to him as Lord verse 20 if you then forsake him and serve foreign gods he will turn and do you harm that is to say God will discipline he will correct he will rebuke remember how C.S.

Lewis says about Aslan the great lion king in the chronicles of Narnia he's not a tame lion and you can't play games with God but of course our hearts even if they are set to serve the Lord are unable to do it apart from his grace that's why the future is dependent on grace as much as the past was there is no one like him there's no real choice and the people reaffirm it they say in verse 21 no but we will serve the Lord and great that they do their hearts are set that way but Joshua wants them to be realistic it's going to be resisted it's going to be tough at times you're going to end up serving something or someone and if it isn't the Lord then you will lose the land and you will not experience the blessings he longs that you should have so Joshua's reaction is to accept their choice they cannot serve by their own determination but to point them to the covenant to point them to the fact that only in

God will they find the resources to be able to fulfill the promise which is in their hearts then put away the foreign gods that are among you so if tonight I am saying yes I want to serve the Lord I recognize that he has done these great and good things for me one of the things he will do is to say well then that idol needs to go that God needs to be removed that hindrance needs to be dealt with and the people said the Lord our God we will serve and him we will obey and so verse 25 Joshua made a covenant with the people that day our time's gone but we are just about to partake in a covenant meal we are just about to break bread together and drink wine together and to remember that we too are covenant people not a covenant sealed at Shechem and marked by the book of the law of God and a large stone as a witness but a covenant sealed at Calvary and marked in the shed blood and the broken body of the Lord Jesus and remembered in the bread and the wine when they had to the Passover meal when they came out of Egypt it was impossible to eat the Passover and stay in Egypt it was the meal that brought them out now as they renew the covenant and every time we eat the Lord's Supper that's what we're doing we're saying I accept God's covenant mercy I commit myself to be a member of God's covenant community it's impossible to go back to Egypt it's impossible to eat the Lord's

Supper and to have those secret idols still treasured in our kit bags now he requires wholeheartedness he requires total devotion he requires a heart that is set to live for him alone and that knows that when I fail as I will because I can't serve the holy and jealous God in the way that he demands but when I fail that his grace is sufficient and Israel proved that verse 31 says they 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 his grace was sufficient and if that is true in the Old Testament how much more true in the New that Israel didn't deserve any of this nor do we but that the grace of God that comes to us in our Lord Jesus Christ his body broken in our place his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins that is the reminder that calls us to serve the Lord day by day well that's what the table speaks to us of and as we prepare our hearts to eat and drink in remembrance of him let's remember that it isn't just something that happens in church tonight but that what we are symbolizing is feeding on Christ in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving and finding his blood to go on cleansing us day by day from our sins it's a banquet of God's grace and just as [ 43 : 09 ] Joshua's people entered into that grace so much more can we as we eat the bread and drink the cup a word of prayer grant us Lord that grace we pray and in our hearts divided as we know they are help us tonight to reaffirm I will serve the Lord and in remembering your great mercy to us help us to draw upon that resource of grace every day of our lives that we might live lives that are pleasing in your sight through Jesus Christ our Lord amen you