Chameleon - Part One

# Choose for Yourselves

## (Joshua 24:2-15)

We’re beginning a brand-new message series entitled “Chameleon” and today I want to share with you a message about living on the fence. In other words, living your life in limbo, living in a condition or place of uncertainty, an undecided position between two polar opposites. And I’ve entitled today’s message “Choose for Yourselves” because many of us are living our lives in that place of indecision and are chameleons in our culture.

This is a wake-up call to all followers of Christ because we’re called to stand out, but many of us look just like the world. We talk like, look like, act like and live like everyone else around us. And so, even though we were meant to be salt and light, a city on a hill, we just blend into our surroundings like a chameleon. And today, I want to challenge you to fight the urge to fit in, because God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.

You see, the Bible says, “we are Christ’s ambassadors” as though God were making his appeal through us. He reconciled the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them, and so we speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20, NLT)! And I can’t help but feel a sense of urgency as we begin this new season and schools are finally reopening, while local governments are trembling because of sickness, and as American troops are withdrawing from Afghanistan, terrorists in the name of their god are senselessly taking lives of the innocent. I believe there are some lessons that God wants us to learn, particularly in the church, about how we should govern ourselves in this season.

Would you turn in our Bibles to the 24th chapter of Joshua because I think what Joshua has to say to the people of God applies to us as well. There is so much happening in the world today, we certainly can’t take anything for granted anymore. Over the past year and a half, the fear of our society has dictated much of what we do or what we’ve been allowed to do, and many areas of our lives were suddenly cut off, shut down, and redirected. Now as we enter into this new season, we find ourselves trying to incorporate some semblance of normalcy in our lives.

As I was reflecting on this passage of Scripture, I believe there is a continuity between the struggles and challenges that Joshua mentions and the situation we find ourselves in today from a spiritual standpoint. I believe that the words Joshua spoke were meant to live beyond that time, beyond those people that he spoke to, echoing into our lives today as the living and enduring word of God. And so, let’s read together of God’s faithfulness in Joshua chapter 24, beginning at verse two,

“Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt” (Joshua 24:2-4).

“Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. When I brought your fathers out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. But they cried to the Lord for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the desert for a long time” (Joshua 24:5-7).

“I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand” (Joshua 24:8-10).

“Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you — also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant” (Joshua 24:11-13).

Then in verse 14, Joshua pleads with the people, saying, "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served 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" (Joshua 24:14-15).

Joshua gathered the leaders and the people of Israel together to help them understand the meaning of what they have experienced under his leadership. He wants them to understand how God has fought for them in the past, and so he makes a connection between their past victories and their future promise. He does this so that they will be confident in the fact that God will continue to fight their battles even now as they are living in the fulfillment of the promise that God made to their ancestors. And so, this was a nation of people with a lot of history, they’ve covered a lot of ground, they’ve made a lot of progress, because God had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt. He had brought them through the Red Sea, walked with them through wilderness, took them safely through the Jordan River, but some of the stuff they brought with them should’ve stayed on the other side of the river. And so, God told Joshua to tell the people to make a choice, to choose what they’re going to do, to choose who they’re going to serve, because that choice will not only affect their lives, but it will also mark the next generation.

In this season, in this self-absorbed, self-seeking, self-promoting culture, I believe God is asking each one of us to make a Joshua decision. God has stopped the clock to say that all this stuff that you’ve trusted, all of the stuff you’ve been preoccupied with, all of the stuff that you’ve elevated and even prioritized over and above him, he has drawn a proverbial line in the sand, and he says, “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.” You see, the lives that we have lived prior to this moment are not sufficient for the calling which we have received. He says, “Choose for yourselves” because if nobody else gets serious about prayer, if nobody else gets serious about the things of God, what are you and your house going to do? If nobody else takes serving God seriously, will you do it?

I’ve got to tell you, if this last year hasn’t pushed you and given you an urgency to seek God, I don’t know what else will. And I believe that he has drawn a line in the sand today, because he’s tired of playing games with people who say they love him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength but don’t obey him. You see, either you serve him or you don’t, but there is no middle ground. He has seen your unfaithfulness and he’s calling you to make a choice because he’s a jealous God.

Joshua said because of your rebellion and your sins, because you have forsaken the Lord and served foreign gods,

"You are not able to serve the Lord. (Because) He is a holy God; he is a jealous God” (Joshua 24:19).

And so, God isn’t playing games, and if you came today hoping to hear a watered-down gospel you came to the wrong place; because I’m not going to tell you that you can do what you want to do or live how you want to live. You’ve got to choose for yourselves whom you will serve.

Joshua pleaded with the people in verse 14, he said,

"Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt…” (Joshua 24:14).

In other words, you’ve got to make sure that God remains the priority in your house, the priority in your life, and so you’ve got to let go of the idols. Anything that has kept you from giving God your everything, you’ve got to lay it down, break it in pieces, and get it out of your house. And that includes anyone who has kept you from giving God your full attention, any distraction, any godless relationship that you have allowed to continue in your life needs to be kicked to the curb.

Joshua tells the people of God, you’ve got to make a choice. He says, you can serve the gods your fathers served in Egypt, you can even serve the gods of the Amorites in whose land you’re living right now, it’s up to you, it’s your decision, but I’ll tell you what I’m going to do, because I’ve already made up my mind.

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

And so, Joshua made it very clear, he said, “I love you all, we’re family, but you’re going to have to choose for yourselves.” In other words, “You can do what you want; but as for me and my house, we’re going to serve the Lord.”

Today, I want to encourage you, maybe bring a little godly conviction, and a whole lot of inspiration to each one of you, because you can’t sit on the fence. You can’t be a chameleon and truly love God, you’ve got to choose for yourself whom you will serve, because God is a jealous God. That’s why James spoke so strongly to the church in Jerusalem, he warned them,

“You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?” (James 4:4-5, NIV).

Now, we understand that adultery is unfaithfulness, it’s sin, it’s wrong and it destroys marriages and it destroys relationships, but the Holy Spirit here is not talking about people who are cheating on their spouses. He’s talking about Christians who are cheating on God because they want the best of both worlds. And so, let me explain it this way, as believers we’re joined to Christ, it’s like we’re married, his Spirit lives inside of us, and we should be living happily ever after. But what happens is that our hearts begin to wander, we’re no longer satisfied with God, and so we start looking for some more excitement, some action on the side that will make us happy, and the Bible says that causes the Holy Spirit to envy intensely. Another translation says,

"The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? (James 4:5, NKJV).

Not just jealous like somebody who is overly sensitive, not jealous like your ex, but jealous because he gave himself completely for you and you are his. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was stripped naked and nailed to a cross while those he came to save mocked him, cursed him, and spit on him. He endured the cross, scorning its shame, so that you could be in a relationship with him but when you choose to be a friend of the world you break that holy union.

And so, God sent his Son to redeem you, assuming the rights of ownership and ongoing relationship with you. He gave you his life in its entirety in exchange for yours, not just part of you, not just the Sunday you, but he wants all of you. In fact, as a Christian you’re in a covenant with God, you’re his purchased possession, and when you choose to be a friend of the world his Spirit envies intensely. He yearns jealously because the Scripture says, he won’t share his glory with anybody else, he will not share his praise with carved idols (Isaiah 42:8). He says,

“I will not share my glory with idols!” (Isaiah 48:11, NLT).

The problem is that some of us continue to cheat on God, we want him to be like a girlfriend on the side, and we expect him to be okay with it, but he’s not okay with it.

In fact, God says, choose for yourselves whom you will serve, because he’s not going to be a little hot date on the side. He’s not content with just a little bit of you, he wants to have all of you, and so you can’t keep a foot in both worlds. You can’t be a chameleon because you’ll never go deep with God when you’re having an affair with the world, you’ll never be able to say like David did,

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want” (Psalms 23:1).

And so, if you spend your days worried about what you might be missing, fearful that you’re going to lose your life, then you most certainly will.

If you’re sitting on the fence thinking that you can be a part-time Christian, a secret agent, a chameleon, you may think that you have the best of both worlds, but it’s really an un-gratifying lifestyle. Because, you’ll have just enough Jesus that you aren’t able to fully enjoy the world and you will have just enough of the world that you won’t be able to fully live for God. And so, if you’re living your life as a chameleon, a part-time Christian, you’ll never be able to receive full-time benefits of Christ.

That’s why he invites every one of you to make up your mind, to choose for yourselves whom you will serve, because if you’re living your life as a chameleon, you’re depriving yourself of the enjoyment or the indulgence of both worlds. In fact, Jesus said it this way in Revelation chapter 3,

“I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16).

And so, you’re only hurting yourself by sitting on the fence, because not only are you alienating yourself from God, but you’re not able to fully enjoy the world because you’ve got just enough of God to make you feel guilty about it. And then you’re not able to enjoy fellowship with God, because you are friends with the world and his Spirit within you is grieved. And so, you’re sitting on the fence, trying to hold onto both worlds and by refusing to make a choice you are actually missing out on both.

Joshua pleads with the people of God in verse 14,

"Fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:14).

Notice that he doesn’t say just believe in God, he doesn’t say trust him, but he says serve him with all faithfulness. Today I want to encourage you not to sit on the fence any longer, not just attending church, not just hiding in church, but be a contributor and not a consumer. Jump off the fence and serve, support your church, give a tithe, be a part of the body of Christ.

My prayer is that you would hunger and thirst for the living God. That if you’ve been sitting on the fence, that the Holy Spirit would put a fire in it, electrifying it and causing you to jump off into the things of God, so that you would experience the pleasure of his presence. As the psalmist declared,

“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Psalms 16:11).

I want you to be able to experience the joy that the Bible promises, the joy of his presence, the joy you’ve been missing, and that you would experience the fullness of life. No longer a chameleon, but committed to Jesus, serving him, so that the world will know there’s something different about you.

In fact, the Bible says, “It will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God” (Ecclesiastes 8:12).

And I believe that, because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7). The fear of the Lord is wisdom and to shun evil is understanding (Job 28:28). And so, we no longer want to flirt with the world, flirting with sin, but as the Bible says in Deuteronomy chapter 6,

“Fear the Lord your God, serve him only…” (Deuteronomy 6:13).

We need to choose for ourselves, no longer living as chameleons, not choosing to be friends of the world, not choosing to be enemies of God, but fearing him and serving him with all faithfulness.

That is my prayer for you today, that you would stop walking the line, stop looking this way and that, making sure that you don’t miss anything, wanting to have the best of both worlds. But as the psalmist said, that you would,

“Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling” (Psalms 2:11).

Not fearful of what your friends might say, not worried about the latest scores, the scandals in Hollywood, or even the details of what’s happening around the world. Instead of being in touch with the world, obsessed by the world, and feeding off the fear in the media, I believe God would prefer us to be completely ignorant about what is happening in the world. He tells us not to be yoked together with unbelievers and says,

“Therefore, come out from them and be separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17)!

You see, God is more concerned that we would be with him, that he would be our God, and we would be his people. That we would serve and fear him above all things, but you’ve got to choose for yourselves.

Joshua says it this way in verse 15, “If serving the Lord seems undesirable to you,” if it seems evil, too difficult, or maybe you think God is too boring, or you don’t want to be one of those crazy Jesus freaks, he says,

“Then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served 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” (Joshua 24:15).

Now, in that culture when a man made a decision his household would follow him. And so, Joshua is saying, “I refuse to be a chameleon, as for me and my house, as for my family, my coworkers, and my friends, they will all be influenced by my commitment to God because I’m going to serve him and him alone.” He said,

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

Would you say that with me? “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Somebody online, somebody on Facebook, put that in the comments, “As for me and my house,” this is your declaration, “We will serve the Lord.”

Not a chameleon, not sitting on the fence, but serving the Lord.

Today I want to challenge you, challenging the church, challenging myself, what would our church look like if the remnant, just a few of us would heed the call today, to jump off the fence and go all out for Jesus?

I can tell you that this one decision has greatly influenced my life, my family, and my ministry. And I want to invite you to do the same, but you’ve got to choose yourself. This is an invitation to change, but not as a chameleon, not blending in wherever you go, but it’s an invitation to stand out, to lasting transformation, and eternal change.

Today if there are things that God has put his finger on and you know they need to go, if God is convicting you, if God is moving your heart, I want you to make that decision and lay it down.

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