

**Mother's Day**  
**Joshua 24:1-2a,14-18**  
**May 8, 2005**

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

**The Believer's Pledge of Allegiance**

1. Why Allegiance?
2. What Does Allegiance Mean?
3. How Do We Foster Allegiance?

*NIV **Joshua 24:1** Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. <sup>2</sup> 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... "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. <sup>15</sup> 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."*

*<sup>16</sup> Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! <sup>17</sup> It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. <sup>18</sup> And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God."*

**"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands: one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."** You probably learned the pledge of allegiance in elementary school. Students have been using the pledge since at least 1892 when President Benjamin Harrison borrowed it from a magazine for children and ordered that it be used in the schools of our land. There's little doubt why the president issued that executive order: It was a way of instilling loyalty to our country in the nation's children.

In Joshua 24 we hear another pledge of allegiance. This time, though, it's not a group of school children standing before the Stars and Stripes, but the people of Israel standing before the LORD. Joshua, the aged leader of Israel, leads the way by pledging, *"As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."* Today, as we take a closer look at the believer's pledge of allegiance, we want to ask three

questions: 1] Why allegiance? 2] What Does Allegiance Mean? and 3] How do we foster allegiance?

### **1. Why Allegiance?**

The first question is, “Why allegiance?” Why promise loyalty? If that question is asked in regard to our country, we can supply a whole list of answers, beginning with the fact that God in his Word tells us to live in obedient allegiance to our rulers. Additionally, for many of us, this country is our native land, a land in which we’ve received many blessings, such as religious and political freedom. A promise of loyalty comes quite naturally for people who love their country.

For similar reasons Joshua pledged his allegiance to the true God: he’s done great things for Joshua and for Israel. Joshua had crossed the Red Sea with Israel in the Exodus. He had served as chief of staff for Moses. He was one of the twelve spies sent into Canaan in advance of what was supposed to be an Israelite invasion. He and Caleb, though, were the only spies who believed Israel could conquer the Canaanites with the walled cities and their imposing inhabitants. Now Joshua had led the people of Israel into the Promised Land and seen them win victory after victory, including the stunning defeat of Jericho. God’s great acts were still fresh in mind. The Israelites themselves confessed, *“It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our forefathers out of Egypt, from the land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on the entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land.”* A promise of loyalty came quite naturally to people who recognized God’s great faithfulness.

God wants our loyalty every bit as much as he wanted the loyalty of the Israelites. Allegiance to the Triune God isn’t optional. The LORD says, **“I the LORD your God am a jealous God.”** (“Jealous” in the sense that he does not tolerate faithlessness.) Jesus adds a promise to the call to loyalty when he says, **“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you a crown of life.”** (Rev. 2:10)

The motive for our allegiance to God is his allegiance to us. Never has he been anything less than faithful. The pinnacle of God’s faithfulness to us was in sending his own Son to be tortured and finally to die as the stand-in for a world of sinners, the vast majority of whom didn’t even appreciate what Jesus was doing. God the Father faithfully raised Jesus from death on Easter morning and in faithfulness to his promises he will raise us from death on the day that Jesus returns. God the Father faithfully sent the Holy Spirit to lead us to the truth and sustain us in the faith. He forgives our sins and forgets them times without number. He has his hand on our shoulder at every step of our earthly pilgrimage. He never fails us, never forgets us, never leaves us fearful or forlorn. These are just some of the reasons for pledging our allegiance to our LORD.

Joshua wasn't content to let the Israelites guess at what form their allegiance to the LORD might take. He outlined basic allegiance for them. Allegiance meant 1] throwing away their idols, and 2] it meant serving the LORD faithfully.

## **2. What Does Allegiance Mean?**

Joshua's prescription for allegiance started this way: *"Throw away the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt."* The idolatry of the ancestors of Abraham is well documented in the Scriptures. And the infamous incident in which Israel worshiped a golden calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai was still relatively recent history. It seems likely that the image of a calf was chosen because it was something the Israelites were familiar with from their time in Egypt. Are we to conclude, though, that even now as the LORD settles them into new homes in the Promised Land that some of the Israelites are still paying homage to idols? We don't know, but it's not beyond belief that such a thing could have happened. Idols turn up at some strange places in Bible history. Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel, when she left home, absconded with her father's household idols. When the future King David's wife, Michal, wanted to help her husband escape from assassins, she put an idol in his bed and covered it with the bedclothes. We wonder why an idol so close at hand in David's house. Even the great King Solomon, who built the spectacular temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, deviated from loyalty to the LORD and worshiped idols in a big way. The sin of idolatry was a perpetual threat for Israelites.

Does that shock us? I shouldn't. Idolatry is common, here and now in this country. The blatant idolatry of carved and cast figures is becoming more visible in our country with each passing year. But a more subtle threat—and therefore a greater threat—is the secret idolatry that church-going, creed-speaking Christians can fall into. The Bible, for example, identifies greed as idolatry. Anyone who's ever believed that money would solve all his problems, or turned godly priorities on their head in the pursuit of money, or been miserly with God's gift of money, has broken the First Commandment just as surely as if he had clapped his hands and bowed reverently before an idol of stone. But greed isn't the only modern idol. So many people today are so confident of their own ability to make their way through life by their wits and determination that they see no role for God. They live their lives without taking him into account and thus become guilty of the idolatry of self. Others spend so much time working, watching television, exercising or playing on their computers that God and his Word are squeezed out of their lives. That's idolatry, too. Joshua's words still apply: "Throw away your idols."

Instead of serving idols, God wants us to serve him. *"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness,"* Joshua told Israel. Serving the LORD begins with trusting him to supply our needs. Martin Luther wrote in his *Large Catechism*, 'A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need.' Those who serve the LORD trust him to supply their every need, be it physical or spiritual. The service of the true God begins with the trust that Jesus Christ is way, the truth, and the life, the one and only

way to the Father. After that, serving God means finding delight in obeying his commandments. All of life becomes worship as we strive to glorify God with our studies in school or our employment or our retirement, with our family life and recreation, and—of course—through our love for the hearing and learning of his Word. God hasn't been vague about the sort of service that pleases him. His Word is our guide.

One final question. If it's true that allegiance to the true God is perpetually threatened, what can we do to foster allegiance? President Harrison believed that he could foster loyalty to the republic by commanding the recitation of a pledge of allegiance. Joshua, the great leader of Israel, attempted to foster allegiance by publicly pledging his own allegiance to the true God. *"But as for me and my household,"* he said, *"we will serve the LORD."*

### **3. How Do We Foster Allegiance?**

Do you hear the leadership resonating from that statement? Joshua personally had no power to ensure that the nation of Israel would remain faithful to God. In fact, he was clearly concerned about the future faithfulness of Israel. But there were two things he could do. First, he could make it plain where he stood, so that others could take courage from his example. And, second, he could make sure that he carried out the responsibilities that God had given him as the head of his household. With his pledge of allegiance here, Joshua shows himself to be not only a great leader of his nation, but also a sterling example of what it means to be a husband, father, and grandfather.

We could use more men like Joshua. Men in general still seem to be in confusion about what it means to be a man. The women's movement, while it made some valid points, has made many men reluctant to actually lead their families, lest they be branded as sexist or chauvinist. Other men have gladly stepped aside to let their wives lead, since doing so leaves them more time to do the stereotypical "man things." The result is a tragic void of male leadership in the home.

By publicly stating his aim to lead his household in service to the true God, Joshua shows us what it means to be a real man. A real man isn't someone who crushes beer cans on his forehead. Being a real man isn't about physical strength or sexual prowess or ostentatious displays of earning power. Instead, Weldon Hardenbrook, the author of a book on Christian manhood, said, "Real men take responsibility for the physical and spiritual care of children they beget and for those begotten and deserted by others." In other words, they not only say, "As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD," but they act on that vow of allegiance.

Here's the question for us, men: Do we want the next generation to share our personal allegiance to Jesus Christ? If the answer is yes, then the next question has to be, "What are we going to do to make sure it happens?" We need modern-day Joshuas, leading home devotions, bringing their families to church, grounding themselves in the Word in Bible class, teaching the children of others

in Sunday school, and concerned enough about the work of Christ to sacrifice their time to serve on boards and committees and attend voters' meetings. Where you see men doing those things, you see real men.

“As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” That’s a believer’s pledge of allegiance and it’s a fitting motto for every Christian household. Aged Joshua spoke those words in what may have been a final effort to influence his fellow Israelites. And his words are still influencing believers today, reminding us of the LORD’s faithfulness of the blessings that come when we are faithful to him. Amen.