

St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Penrith

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ENCOURAGEMENT LETTER – 2JAN25

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Hugh here. How are you today? This week I'm thanking God for his blessings over the past year. Today our Encouragement is "Choose today whom you will serve" before we move onto church matters.

ENCOURAGEMENT: Choose today whom you will serve

Next to my front door hangs a sign that says: "As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord." It's a quote from Joshua 24:15. As we begin a new year, it's a good passage to reflect on. Chapter 24 is the last chapter in Joshua. The people have taken the land. They're ready to settle down. They're ready to rest and prosper. That's probably how many of us feel right now. 2024 is done. The toil of last year is over. It's time to rest. But it's also time to think about the year ahead. That's the case for us, and it was the case for the people in Joshua's day. Joshua calls the people together and presents them with a challenge:

¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, 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 to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! ¹⁷ It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our parents 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. ¹⁸ 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."

The people are ready to settle in the land, but that comes with risks. In their comfort, the people may forget who their God is. Idolatry may creep in. Joshua challenges them to re-commit. To choose again. To re-dedicate their lives to the Lord. The people do this, pointing to

God's salvation in the past. It was God who brought them out of Egypt. It was God who provided for them in the wilderness. It was God who drove out the nations from Canaan.

Just over a week ago we celebrated Christmas. It was a time when we remembered God's salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. The one who brought a new and better Exodus. An Exodus from slavery to sin. Who brings in a new era of God with us. Who fills us with his Spirit. Who opens the way for heaven to come to earth. As you rest over the January period, remember what came before. Remember salvation. Commit to following the Lord afresh.

But shockingly, as soon as the people make this decision:

¹⁹ Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you."

²¹ But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD."

At the end of the day, all our new-year planning can fall flat. Only God knows what 2025 will bring. We don't know how real life might change or end our best made plans. In the same way, we can choose today to follow God, but we don't have it in us to keep that promise. This passage calls us to make the choice. Joshua wanted the people to choose the Lord. Jesus calls you to follow him. You have a choice to make. But ultimately, you don't have the resolve to keep it. This passage makes us look to God. It makes us rest in God's grace. It makes us rely on the Holy Spirit. This new year, choose who you will serve. Choose the Lord. Then rest easy knowing that God has chosen you. God has chosen you for life and blessing, and given you what you need to get it.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Love in Christ, Hugh