

Newton Aug. 26, 2018 Joshua 24;

“The EYE Test”

Joshua is leading the people into a **traumatic** time period, a **transition** from **his** leadership, to the new untested and unknown system of judges to respond to crises, **but no set leader in place, all the time**. They would have to trust God’s **spirit** to **inspire** a new judge **each time** a problem arose, a judge who after the emergencies were taken care of, would go back to their previous occupation. They would have to **learn to trust God** in new ways.

Change fell hard and fast on them. Change **tests** all of us, and our faith. First Moses, now Joshua, leaders the people trusted completely and thought they couldn’t possibly live without, is **stepping off** the stage of life. As they did when Moses died, the people start to **panic**.

“How can we go on?”

How can we live without him?”

What will we do?”

Is it up to US? We **barely** made it through the past years with Joshua, how can we **survive** now as we enter a new future with an unknown, untrusted part- time leader?”

It was great they **trusted** Joshua, and **appreciated** all that he did for them, through all the battles at Jericho, the Valley of Achor, Ai, and Amalek, while destroying 31 kings en route to controlling the land of Canaan. Joshua was so **unstoppable**, it seemed the people could **easily trust** in God, when Joshua could **decisively deliver** God's protection.

But, **every day** they saw Joshua as a visible **sign** of God’s trust and protection. With Judges, you had to wait until the crises arose to see **if** God would **remember** them and **respond**, **and would there be a Judge to answer the call of the spirit**.

Since God was **easy to trust** when Joshua was there, you just knew their trust was **more in Joshua**, than the Lord God. Since Joshua knew

what was inappropriate, he told, challenged, and really begged them to go back to the source, One who is, Lord of life.

So many times Joshua, reminds the people what God says to them, Joshua 24:

"I took your father Abraham, I gave him Isaac, I sent Moses and Aaron, I brought your fathers out of Egypt, I gave your enemies into your hand, I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, AND I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you dwell therein; you eat fruit of vineyards and oliveyards which you did not plant!

Now Therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served 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"

Now I would like you to think about a picture of the wood carving by Durer: Knight, Death and Devil. He showed in the carving all the different forms of temptations to be afraid and **disbelieve**: demons, wild vicious animals, death, fear, even love of his home might draw him from the faith.

He even kept his eyes **off** his own family and castle as temptations to hide.

His faith **sight** was on our Lord, much like our Lord's faith trust while on the cross, was set on His heavenly Father. Nothing can be as important as keeping their eyes on the Lord, not even home and family.

Joshua wants his people to keep their eyes off, not just what terrorizes them, but could **distract** them in any way, and **promise** them a safe haven to seduce them from fully trusting the Lord God, such as the Canaanites with their gods.

What do your eyes concentrate on?

Keep your eyes only on the Lord!

Joshua did not like what he **saw**. Frequently, the people cry out, of course **proudly** and **loudly** proclaim, “we will serve the Lord, far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods.” Then on a note of **disquietude**, knowing how easy it is to just get people to SAY things, Joshua looks at the people and just shakes his head.

He looks into the eyes of the people, deep into their eyes, and something tells him, all their words of **faithful exhortations** are going to be **futile**, “**You cannot** serve the Lord, for he is a holy God, he is a jealous God.” (Joshua 24:19) He will ask more of you than you realize, more than you are willing to handle!

Joshua at the end of his life, looks at the people, as many great religious leaders have done and said quite simply, “I can see this next step is **just too much** for you.” He looked at the people and didn't see hope in their eyes.

He looked at them intently, and **they could not look him back in the eye**. When they could not look him straight in the eye, he knew they were all in trouble. Their relationship was in great jeopardy. You knew, if they could not look Joshua in the eye, they surely could not look the Lord God in the eye. THE EYE TEST!

How do they get to that point where they could look at each other, AND the Lord God, in the eye and acknowledge, “we are on the same page- we **totally understand** and **trust** each other.”

Let’s look at the process to learn how to trust on a more reasonable level, yet difficult. It is how good relationships work best, which is what the Lord God and the Israelites also had, at times, but not so much with Joshua now on the way out.

Nehru in India was not **initially** a close follower of Gandhi, since Gandhi moved around in **strange political landscapes**. What Gandhi expected of Nehru and really the rest of India and world, was a big leap. When the first idea came along to befuddle Nehru, it stunned him, **but**, **Nehru cut him some slack**. He **grappled hard** with Gandhi to see how his ideas **could** be possible. He **didn’t outright reject** him.

The more **audacious** the suggestion, the **harder** Nehru **struggled** to see how Gandhi was right in his estimations. In many ways he BEGAN with the **assumption** that Gandhi knew what he was talking about in terms of the controversial non-violent approach. He **struggled hard** to grasp what seemed **outlandish, unreasonable and impractical**, instead of simply dismissing them.

Each time Gandhi upped the ante, since the other ideas came true, the **easier** it was to **dive in and grapple**.

In some ways, it was his **struggling** process (faith) that increased his ability to have faith in him.

The **harder** the idea, the **harder** the struggle, the more they **owned** the situation, and the **stronger the relationship grew!**

This is the same way disciples grew in faithfulness to Jesus. The more He asked of them, the more they grew in steadfast behavior. It is the same for loving relationships: the more you go through tough times TOGETHER, the stronger the relationship.

It takes a while for all of us to reach the heart, the seat of real action. When do we get to the place where our presumption of truth is **with** Jesus, when He asks us at times, the unthinkable?

Prayer is when we grapple faithfully with those **unthinkable faith assertions**, working at it until we see what He asks, **is** the truth, and **is** the faith. The harder we struggle faithfully to understand and accept our Lord, the more our heart will line up with what becomes our faithful actions.

Our faith question, when we look into a mirror is, "can I see hope in my eyes, my face? Can I look myself in the eyes?"

The people said all the right things, but Joshua could not see faith alive in anything but what came from their lips! "Lip service," is not a service that gets us through a chaotic wilderness or even a promised land. They said the right things, but their eyes were focused on the fancy Canaanite gods, who might help get them safely through their fear of the future until a Judge arrives: "how can we survive without Joshua?"

The problem they had to face: The Lord God **alongside** Joshua, makes them feel confident. The Lord God **without** Joshua, delivered a very **anemic** and **fragile** faith.

It all works together, when done right. You start to believe, **even** when things look **daunting and fear-filled**. But biting our tongues, instead of turning to other forms of what might help us, allows us to struggle to see what the Lord will do for us.

Each faith adventure needs to begin with the assumption of belief, combined with the struggle, which gets us to believe enough, to follow it faithfully.

The more we accomplish the difficult struggle to see how our Lord is right, gets us to believe more strongly, fervently and quickly, the next time.

But before we can say, “as for me and our house, we will serve the Lord,” it needs stem from that hard struggle to believe, prayed **long** and **often**. Yes, we will start to doubt our faith stamina, **but it is from the seeds of that doubt**, we struggle to see AGAIN how our Lord loves and leads us, even when the road is rocky.

Finally we can look him straight in the eye without blinking or hesitation, and the Lord will see in our eyes, the fruits of our faith. We will look Him in the eye with a strong enough belief, that our actions will match the words that we say, “As for me and our house, we will serve the Lord,” even when He asks more of us, than we think we can accomplish. Can we look Him in the eye???? AMEN

((use at end of sermon) Let’s pause for a second, for as you might ponder, this process Nehru can easily work in negative ways. The same process used by the faith, can also be used by all kinds of belief systems. You can have fervent faith in many **questionable** activities. You can have a VERY FERVENT “faith” in many questionable activities. This faith process can be used for any purpose, the worst being brainwashing.

Once you get someone to accept something even small from you, the next step is easier. The more the abuser, or bully, can get someone to accept it, the more the abused, accepts abuse. Think also Jonestown. Think

also a fraternity initiation process- which obviously can be good and healthy, as well as mean and cruel. The more you put up with, the easier it is to keep accepting new demands. Think also, training camp.

You tell yourself, after the first step accepted, I must have been right, so I do not later want to admit I was wrong. The further you go down the wrong road, the harder it is to admit you made a wrong turn. We don't want to admit we are wrong, so much so, we would rather be going the wrong way. You foolishly buy the new gimmick, therefore you want it to work so much, it really **seems** to work. Everything can be a double edged sword if used for the wrong purpose, in the wrong hands.

My thinking from the above paragraphs comes from the psychological process called: cognitive dissonance. Also for the faith, a lot of thanks is due to Soren Kierkegaard and Helmut Thielicke.

Children's sermons- Can you pass the eye test, when you have to look someone in the eye after lying to them- like when I said to mom, "the dog knocked over the lamp while you were gone!" (aside for the congregation- one of the worst skills is to look someone in the eye, and lie!