

Title: Choose This Day: Settling the Question of Authority in the Tug of War

Sermon Summary: This sermon, part of a series called "Tug of War," centers on the ongoing internal and spiritual battle every person faces over who or what holds ultimate authority in their life. The pastor draws from Old and New Testament passages to demonstrate God's proven track record of power, provision, and faithfulness, arguing that a life surrendered to God's authority is not a life diminished but a life anchored. Using the examples of Joshua, Elijah, and Jesus, the sermon calls listeners to stop wavering between competing loyalties and make a decisive, wholehearted choice to serve God. The pastor also challenges the congregation to examine what they truly worship by observing what occupies their thoughts and conversation most, and to recognize that genuine submission to Christ means accepting him as he is, not as a designer savior tailored to personal preference.

Key Points:

- The "Tug of War" is the constant friction between living for self and surrendering to God, and it plays out in subtle and intense ways throughout daily life
- Worship is defined not merely by religious ritual but by what a person thinks about most and talks about most, meaning money, problems, possessions, and entertainment can all function as false gods
- God's authority is demonstrated throughout Scripture by his command over nature, armies, paralysis, and demonic spirits, establishing him as a trustworthy and capable Lord
- Joshua's farewell address to Israel serves as a model for reminding people of God's faithfulness before calling them to decisive commitment
- Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel mirrors the same challenge: stop wavering between two opinions and choose who is God
- Jesus demonstrated authority that exceeded human understanding, teaching with power, commanding evil spirits, and healing with a spoken word, all of which validate his claim to lordship

- Forgiveness is presented as a non-negotiable condition of genuine faith, not a suggestion, and holding grudges contradicts the authority one claims to submit to
- A made-up mind that has settled the question of God's authority produces peace, stability, and resilience even in the midst of hardship
- God's kindness, not human merit, is what draws people to repentance, and recognizing undeserved provision is a powerful motivator for deeper surrender

Scripture Reference:

- Joshua 24:1-15, in which Joshua recounts God's faithfulness to Israel and calls the people to choose whom they will serve
- 1 Kings 18:16-21, in which Elijah confronts King Ahab and challenges the people of Israel to stop wavering between God and Baal
- Matthew 8:5-13, the account of the centurion whose understanding of authority leads Jesus to commend his faith and heal his servant from a distance
- Mark 1:21-27, in which Jesus teaches with authority in the synagogue and commands an evil spirit to leave a man, astonishing the crowd
- Romans 2:4, where Paul describes God's kindness as the force that leads people to repentance

Stories:

- Joshua's farewell assembly at Shechem, where he recounts the Exodus, the parting of the Red Sea, the provision of manna and quail, the defeat of the Amorites, and God's use of hornets to drive out enemies, before issuing his famous declaration that he and his household will serve the Lord
- Elijah's confrontation with the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah on Mount Carmel, framed around his challenge to the people to stop wavering between two opinions
- The centurion who approaches Jesus on behalf of his paralyzed servant, demonstrating such confidence in Jesus's authority that he insists Jesus need only speak the word, prompting Jesus to declare he had found no greater faith in all of Israel
- The man possessed by an evil spirit in the Capernaum synagogue, whose demons recognize Jesus as the Holy One of God before being commanded

out with a single word

- The biblical account of Abraham being called at age 75 with a barren wife and waiting 25 years for God's promise of descendants to be fulfilled
- The widow who gave her last two small coins, used to illustrate hilarious or joyful generosity and radical trust in God as provider
- A brief personal reference to a friend's father and a story of healing the pastor chose to save for another occasion