

2-12-23

Sermon: Choices, Choices, Choices

Scripture Deuteronomy 30:15-20, CTW Psalm 119:1-8

Hymns: 44, 61, 460

Theme: Of all the choices with which we are faced, there is none as important as to how we will respond to our Creator. When we sort through the implications of our choices, be they major or minor, how does a relationship with Jesus Christ figure into the equation? There is perhaps no greater choice facing us each and every day of our life than this choice.

I. Introduction: Read the Terms of the Contract

Writing in the Wall Street Journal, Missy Sullivan noted that many user agreements, warranties, and disclaimers that come with products are nearly unreadable. Intentionally set in very small type, they actually discourage people from understanding them. Because of this, many people don't read all the terms of contracts before signing them. A university professor of graphic communication pointed to a 32-page user agreement that came with his new smartphone, and said of the company, "They JUST don't want you to read it."

A. In contrast, the Lord is always seeking to communicate with His people in clear and compelling ways, with no attempt to confuse or deceive. When Moses spoke to the Israelites just before they entered the Promised Land, he said, "For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. . . . I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live"
Deuteronomy 30:11, 19.

The Lord wants us to understand His plan and purpose clearly, so

that we may love, obey, and cling to Him—for He is our “life and the length of our days” **v.20**. That’s plain to see.

B. We are faced with choices daily. Some may seem trifling: what to wear, how we will use our time, what to eat. Other choices are significant, having ramifications for the future: schooling and career choices, where we will live, whom we will marry.

Yet of all the choices with which we are faced, of all the many of options set before us, there is none as important as to how we, as created in the image of God, will respond to our Creator.

How does a relationship with Jesus Christ figure into the equation? There is perhaps no greater choice facing us than this one. Remember what Joshua said just a short time after this speech by Moses:

¹⁴ “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt and serve the LORD. 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. **Joshua replies “as for me and my household, we will follow the Lord!”**

II. So, how do we go about making the right choices?

A. We are to choose Obedience over excuses and disobedience to God vs. 11-16.

All of the great saints who had lived before the time of our Lord had experienced God’s mighty power and deliverance because of their faithfulness and obedience to Him. God kept **Daniel** safe in the lion’s den because he chose to obey God. **Esther’s** strength

and courage comes when she trusted in God for the salvation of her people.

Joseph remained faithful to God despite of becoming a slave and prisoner in Egypt and through him; his kindred were saved from the famine. Through **Moses**, God had performed great miracles and He delivered the Israelites out of Egypt.

These are only some of the great saints who wholeheartedly obeyed God and put themselves at God's disposal, willing and ready to do His will. When people like Cain, Saul, Samson and even the Israelites chose to have excuses to disobey God; they went on to become a stumbling block for many who came after them who cited them to justify their own disobedience toward God.

Paul reminds us in **Ephesians 2:8-9** that our salvation is by faith and NOT of works.

While God is concerned about what we do with our lives and the fruit that we can produce for the Kingdom from our efforts, **He is first and foremost concerned with our obedience**. Obedience flows from a heart that is yielded to Him, a life that is surrendered to do HIS will and not OUR will.

B. We are to choose God above Idols (v. 17-18)

Idolatry is the universal human tendency to value something or someone in a way that hinders the love and trust we owe to God. It is an act of theft from God whereby we use some part of creation in a way that steals from honor due to God.

Idolizing something else conflicts with our putting God alone first in our lives, in what we love and trust (**see Deut. 5:7-9 and Romans 1:21-23**).

This reminds me of **Elijah** on the mountain top against the 400 prophets of Baal:

²⁰ "So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. ²¹ Elijah went before the people and said, **"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."**

But the people said nothing. They chose incorrectly!

Putting God first means loving and trusting God first, above all, and with everything we are and have. God has given us every good thing. **Our focus should never be on the gifts themselves instead of the gift Giver, God Almighty!**

It is easy to see how idolatry occurs given our propensity for selfishness. The gifts themselves are easy to control, to manipulate, and to take credit for. They are easy to make, or to take as, **"mine."**

God reminds us that He will not be a partner in wrongdoing. **So when you idolize something else, you're on your own.** God will have no part of it.

In fact I would advise you to take a pretty sturdy umbrella—like one that can withstand fire and brimstone!

The vital question is: What are you going to choose? Are you faithfully willing to stick by God (if you choose Him) **no matter what?**

C. Verse 19 reminds us to choose life and blessings over death and curses (v. 19).

This is not the choice between ice cream or cake for dessert, nor even whether to marry or not. This choice deals with the universal desire, the common thread of human existence. **This is a choice involving life and death.**

What could be more important than this? All choices fade away; they're frivolous when the choice of eternal life is before us! What we do, where we work, whom we marry pales in comparison to

this, the choice is between life and death, between prosperity and destruction.

Early in my Christian life someone told me, "God loves you just the way you are, but He loves you far too much to leave you that way." THINK ABOUT IT!

I've lived on both sides of the fence, but the day I chose Christ I chose life. I renew that choice every day of my life. I'll take God's side any day. God is not talking about suffering and pain as opposed to perpetual health and laughter.

He is talking about the quality of life—having something worth living and dying for. Your choices not only affect your life; they also affect the lives of those who follow after you. Have you ever asked yourself, "Who am I influencing? Who is following in my footprints?"

Is that a good feeling, or does it scare the pants off you? It ought to make all of us think.

But if the choice is so easy, if God's Word is so close, why then is there disobedience? Why do people make the wrong choice? **If it is important and easy, why would anyone make the wrong choice?**

This is a question not only for those who do not know Christ, but for us who claim to have accepted the choice of a **Covenant with God** but still fail to obey. Remember, because it is a clear choice, that does not mean we'll easily obey.

God calls us to RESPOND TO HIS WORD BY MAKING A CHOICE, TAKING A STAND, AND NOT WAIVERING FROM IT! There is no middle ground. Not choosing is just as wrong as choosing wrongly. Think about that!

To stand in the middle is to choose death. **William James**, considered to be one of the leading philosophers of the 19th

century, once said: **"When you have to make a choice and don't make it, that in itself becomes your choice."**

Moses wanted the Israelites to understand that the choice for life was a choice that they would have to make every moment of their lives.

D. Verse 20 tells us to Choose to Love God above everything else.

Moses wanted them to understand that the choice was not a one and done kind of decision. It is a decision to keep on choosing.

With the season of Lent coming up, our belief carries us to the cross of Christ and the empty tomb that becomes the emblem of God's saving grace for us. The call to love God, to listen to God's voice, and to hold fast to God are acts that carry us to God's feet **over and over and over again**.

We do not love God for a fleeting moment and move on. The love of God in this passage is used as a verb not a noun, not a description of an emotion, but an action word that defines a nature of a relationship with God.

The call to listen to God is not describing a moment when God speaks and we hear, but a lifetime of moments when we listen for and hear God's voice for our lives.

The invitation to hold fast to God – to cling to God - is not an embrace in times of crisis, but a choice to hold on with everything we have - all the time – never letting go, never wanting to be separated from the presence of God.

Moses wanted his people to understand that the choice for loving God over other things in life was a choice that they would have to make every moment of their lives.

III. Conclusion, Regardless of the Pressure, We Must Chose Every Day.

A. That is the very point of our passage here in Deuteronomy...it prepares all of God's children for a life where they will make good choices and stand for all of them!

God chose the death of His one and only Son so that we would be declared perfect, based not on our own record, but on having our sins atoned for by Christ's death on the Cross so that we might also be credited as righteous due to Christ's perfect obedience.

Now the choice is before you. Because of Christ's death, **God who is your life will empower you to choose life.**

How will you respond? Remember what James brother of Jesus said about being double minded:

James 1:5-8 ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is **double-minded** and **unstable** in all they do.

B. God 's Heart Aches for Us to Make the Right Choices...Every Day. In our passage today, Moses wants Israel to know that their decision to cross the Jordan River and obey God is **crucial**. They have buried the majority of the previous generation because they failed to do what they should have done. They know it is too late for those who have died in the wilderness. They are practically standing over their corpses as Moses speaks his final words to them. Moses doesn't want them to make the same mistakes their parents made.

Listen to the words of John at the end of his Gospel: John 20:30-31,

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, **and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

So, What about you?

God would never want to see any of you making wrong choices on a daily basis... it breaks His heart ...DAILY...when we err on the side of worldliness!

Amen? Let us pray...