

### Choose Life!

***See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.***

***But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.***

***This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.***

Let's just say my wife asked me to go the Jerry's to get some milk. I go. I bet I will stand there for five minutes staring. Which milk does she want? You have a choice between skim, 1%, 2%, and whole; you have white and chocolate. Do I get a quart or a gallon? Should I get cow's milk, or almond milk, or rice milk or coconut milk. I have 12 choices before me so I stand there trying to figure out which kind of milk to bring home.

We have come a long way since the days of Henry Ford who said, "Any customer can have a car painted any color as long as it is black." We have many choices before us on any given day and many decisions to make. I have heard that an adult makes 35,000 decisions in a single day. We make on average 226 decisions on food alone. That makes sense. You go to the restaurant and they have, let's say, 28 items on the menu. You just made 28 decisions—27 "no, I don't want that" decisions and 1 "yes, I'll have that" decision. And then the waitress asks, "What do you want to drink? Water, tea, coffee, milk (and please don't offer me more than one kind), seven flavors of pop, or a beer from our beer menu with 32 different types of beer. And do you want a straw?" Suddenly you are forced to make another fifty decisions!

Wouldn't it be great if we can narrow it down to just two choices? Our Old Testament text does that for us. "***See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.***" What will you choose, life and prosperity or death and destruction? May we choose life!

#### *I. God chose us in Christ.*

We have to understand something before we dive back into our Deuteronomy reading. The choice isn't, "Do you choose God as your God?" The choice is, "Do you want to stay with God or leave him?"

The Israelites didn't choose to make God their God. They didn't come to town and visited all the churches and say, "I like the sermon there, but the bathrooms over there were dirty," and finally picked one that they liked. God chose them. God chose Abraham to be the Father of his people, the Israelites. When God released the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, he didn't just say, "You're free." He led them to the Red Sea and then to Mt. Sinai. They went where he led them. And now he brought them to the edge of the Promised Land. He didn't say, "You want Canaan or China?" They didn't have a choice. He said this is their land. As God reminded them in Isaiah: "***You didn't choose me, I chose you. ... Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name ... you are mine.***"

But they were not the only ones God chose. The Bible, it makes this abundantly clear. You heard it in our sermon text a couple weeks ago: "***But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.***" Jesus tells us in John: "***You did not choose me, but I chose you.***"

Ok. God chose us. Why? As it says in Ephesians: "***For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.***" We just celebrated Valentine's Day, a day to tell someone how much we love him or her. Well, how much does God love you? He has been infatuated with you since before creation. If it was a boy and girl situation, he was carrying a torch for you for a very long time. But there was one problem. He chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight. But we are not holy. We are not blameless. It would be like choosing a kid's Fisher Price Big Wheel bike to drag your plow. It is cute, but it will not work. For God to choose us, something had to be done about us.

You heard about it in our gospel reading earlier. When the subject of forgiveness came up, what was Jesus' answer? Forgive someone seventy times seven if necessary. And he gave us a parable to describe it. A servant owed his master 10,000 talents. Some experts tell us that was eleven times the gross national product of the day. That's trillions of dollars. There was no way anyone can pay that back. He deserved prison, but the master forgave him, all of it.

One word in the Bible used for sin is "debt." How much do we owe God? If anyone hates his brother he has murdered him in his heart. Today some forms of hate are praised. But heaven is no place for haters. So every hateful thought must be paid for. We are to love God. Yet how often do we want to spend our time with anyone, anything more than God? If ours was a marriage, God would have divorced us long ago. If the wage of one sin is death, how much do we owe God for all those sinful thoughts and words and actions? But he forgives every one of them. He does because of the song the kids sang, "Lift High the

Cross." Jesus, the Son of God, was lifted high on the cross where he became sin for us and paid the price for every sin you and I and every person of the world committed.

So our sins may be as red as scarlet, yet because of Christ we sinners are as white as wool. God chose us and in Christ he forgives us and makes us blameless in his sight. So, what do you want to do? May we choose life by staying with God.

## *II. Now choose life.*

When I studied this text this week, I kept thinking of Baptism and Confirmation. On Baptism, it was your parents who carried you up to the font. You were passive; you didn't do anything. It was there God the Spirit gave you a new birth in Christ. It was there faith was started. Thirteen years later that baby has grown up. On Confirmation that young adult is not carried before church, but walks up on his or her own. On that day, that believer confesses the faith that was started at Baptism and that has grown through God's Word all those years. On that day he or she makes a commitment: I will love and follow God all the days of my life. Faith isn't started there. It is confessed and it is accompanied by a promise.

That is what we have in our text. On the border of the Promised Land, Moses has one last bit of advice for his people. ***"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ... Now choose life."***

Doesn't really sound like much of a choice, life and prosperity or death and destruction. Of course they wanted life and prosperity. Who wouldn't? It would be so easy. Love God. Walk in his ways. Don't worship or adopt any other god. So simple. But they underestimated the powers that wanted to lure them away. I think you know your Old Testament well enough. They didn't remain faithful to God. They constantly pursued other gods. They didn't resist sin but embraced it. Yes, God made sure a remnant remained true to him. You met them at Christmas, believers like Mary and Joseph, Anna and Simeon, the shepherds and many others. But as a whole, the people wanted life and prosperity, but by not resisting temptation, they ended up choosing death and destruction.

What will you choose? Life and prosperity, of course. But don't make the same mistake. We still live in a wilderness with all of its dangers like sin and temptation. They say an adult can make up to 35,000 decisions in a single day. Some of your decisions may not involve heaven or hell like which shirt you put on today. But many decisions will. Hatred will start to glow in your heart. And maybe you are justified. Someone really hurt you. Or maybe you are being a little jealous and you hate someone because they have something you want. It doesn't matter. What decision are you going to make, let it grow, or do you recognize it as hate and say, "God still loved me even though I gave him every reason to hate me so I am going to resist hate. Instead, I will continue to love and forgive that person, even seventy times seven times." So many of our decisions do have spiritual consequences: contentment or jealousy; lie or speak the truth in love; gossip or speak well of others; listen and think and meditate more on God's Word or to spend more time searching the internet for something stupid like the history of the Q-Tip.

And what will happen when you begin to wander away from God? God is patient. He will call you back. David started to veer away. He took on yet another wife and murdered her husband to get her. But God sent Nathan to show his sin. And when David realized what had happened, do you remember what Nathan said? You are forgiven. You will not die. David was back on track.

This makes me think of some boys playing on the farm during winter. They decided to play a game. Who can leave the straightest path of footprints in the snow on the way back to the house? So all four set off and when they get there, only one set was straight. The other three wandered this way and that. The winner explained why his was straight. He didn't look at where he was walking. He kept his head up and kept his eyes on the house. The others stared at the ground.

The Lord has set before us his heavenly home. Jesus died to make it possible. The Spirit brought you to faith so you belong there. Keep your head up. Keep your eyes on that home. You do this by loving the Lord back. Follow his ways. And when you begin to wander, and you will, let someone get your attention as they point you back to God and heaven. And most of all, lift high the cross. This is how you choose life and prosperity. Amen.