

The Choice Is Yours

By Mike Lorence

Recently, I heard a wonderful teaching by Rev. Billy Graham on Making Choices*. It was inspiring to me and I thought some of the things he shared would also be a blessing to you.

A Great Gift

God did a wonderful thing when He first formed, made, and created man. He gave him the power of choice. The ability to decide. Freewill. He didn't give it to any of the animals and it's one thing that clearly distinguishes us from them. Having the ability to make our own choices or having freedom of will, is a great gift. And it's also one of great love. Our Creator could easily have made man without the ability to choose, but that wouldn't allow us to freely give ourselves to Him. True love is freely given, never demanded, or required. Adam and Eve were the first two individuals who were given a choice to either do God's will or reap the consequences of choosing not to. They chose wrongly. Unfortunately, their decision still impacts each and every individual today.

Two of the primary choices in life are not where you work and who you marry. They are to either choose to make Jesus as your lord and savior and obtain eternal life or follow the ways of the world and reap its corrupt rewards. The key to righteous living is making godly choices and building a consistent lifestyle of those choices over time. In other words, being faithful to God and His Word, and living a life with Jesus as our lord.

Choose You This Day

All throughout the Word of God, we see example after example of people making choices. Let's look at one of those examples of Joshua. Joshua was a great leader for the children of Israel. He worked closely with Moses and took over the leadership once Moses had died. It was his responsibility to take the people into the promised land and to conquer it for the Israelites. At the end of the book of Joshua, we read an amazing record.

Joshua was an old man and knew he was at the end of his life. He brought all the people of Israel together at Shechem. This record is his final address to the people before he dies. He reminds them of all God has done for them since Abraham unto the present day. And he warns them about their idolatry and what would happen to them if they chose not to live for the Lord.

Joshua 24:14-15a (KJV)

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 is telling them they need to decide whether they would serve the Lord or serve the devil by worshipping idols. He didn't tell them to go home and think about it first. He didn't say to

discuss it among yourselves and then get back to me. He told them to decide – make a choice – NOW, TODAY, what you’re going to do. For Joshua and his family, the decision was clear and he stated it emphatically.

Joshua 24:15b (KJV)

¹⁵ But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua’s decision was made before Israel made theirs. What others thought and the direction they chose to take didn’t make a difference to Joshua because he had seen all God had done. He also knew it really wasn’t much of a choice. God or idols? Yet people are still struggling with that same choice today.

At some point, each one of us will have to make the same decision in our lives. Will we love and serve God faithfully, or will we choose the ways of the world? Will we walk by the spirit or walk by our senses?

It’s interesting to note that Moses said the same thing to Israel a generation earlier when he was dying.

Deuteronomy 30:19 (KJV)

¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

The same choice applies to each person and to every generation. We have an adversary that wants you to choose him or his idols, but he will settle for you to make no decision. Not making a clear choice is still making a choice. It’s a choice not to decide and it’s usually not the right one. Billy Graham once said, “If you don’t make a decision then time will make it for you and time will always side against you.” Alexander the Great was asked how he conquered the world. He said, “By not wavering.” That’s really quite a statement. Look at the truth of what he said in God’s Word.

James 1:6-8 (KJV)

⁶ But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

⁷ For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

⁸ A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

At times, we waver on the choices we make and how we live. What are our priorities in life? Is Christ first? Have we truly made him lord in our lives as demonstrated through our thoughts and actions? Let’s not waver but CHOOSE THIS DAY WHO WE WILL SERVE. And it happens with the decisions we make. The only way we will know how to make the correct decision, the right decision, is by knowing the Word of God, which at times may also require the revelation manifestations.

Jesus made it clear that we had to choose whom we will serve. You can't serve two masters.

Matthew 6:24 (KJV)

²⁴No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

When I was living in Columbus, Ohio I went to work in a corrugated box factory. My roommate worked in their sales department and he arranged for me to work there in the plant. I was a long-haired hippie but the work environment was much more conservative. I reported to a supervisor and indirectly to his boss, the plant manager. My job was to rotate to various parts of the plant and fill in where needed. I might work on a taping machine for several days and then be moved to the shipping area where we would tie up bundles of a variety of types and sizes of boxes to be sent out. At first it went well, but after several weeks, the director started coming around and moving me from one job to another. A little later the supervisor would come by and tell me to go to a different spot. Then the director would come looking for me and would be upset with me because I wasn't where he had initially assigned me. Regardless of how much I explained to them about the two of them continually moving me around, I couldn't win. I finally had to quit because I learned from experience that verse in Matthew. I couldn't serve two bosses.

When we are constantly pulled back and forth between what the world expects, no, what it DEMANDS of us, and what God has called us to do, we will always be in a No-Win situation. We must decide which master we will serve. God or the world. Until then we will always be in turmoil and our life will never be peaceful.

A rich, young ruler learned this lesson.

Luke 18:18-23 (KJV)

¹⁸And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

¹⁹And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.

²⁰Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.

²¹And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up.

²²Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

²³And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

This ruler made a decision, but his decision made him very sad. It didn't bring him the peace and joy he really desired. Yet, he just couldn't part with the material things in which he placed a

higher value. At times, we place too high a value on things in our lives that stand in the way of doing what God desires for us to do. It seems like an impossible choice. But where are the true riches? For the ruler, his wealth was worth more to him than eternal life. His values were out of line because he placed his physical desires over the spiritual. We don't ever want to be in that situation but when we are, it can be a difficult dilemma. Paul realized that in his own spiritual walk.

Paul's Dilemma

The Apostle Paul was an amazing man. He had to completely change his ways after his conversion on the road to Damascus. He firmly believed that the followers of Christ were wrong and they believed and practiced what was contrary to everything he had been taught and believed. He pursued them with an intense passion and threw them into prison. He was even at the stoning of Stephen. But he fully committed himself to do God's will once he received the holy spirit and understood the truth. Yet he still struggled at times with his sin nature to do what was right versus his "natural" worldly desires.

Romans 7:15-25 (ESV)

¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.

¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,

²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Paul makes it very clear that sometimes choosing the right way, the godly way, the spiritual way, clashed with his old man, natural, evil ways. He described as a war going on within him. But in the last verse he gives thanks to God, because with the mind he chose to serve the law of God. Once we decide, then we take action to serve. The decision must come first, even if the

motivation isn't there. Once we decide and act, the motivation will come and we will see the results of our right decisions.

Which Path Will You Choose?

A famous baseball player was known for his unique sayings. Yogi Berra once made the comment, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." A funny quote but not much help when you think about it. I remember one time I was in a very difficult situation. I had come to a fork in the road regarding a financial decision that I had to make and it wasn't clear which was the best path to take. I spoke to a close friend and explained my predicament to him and my hesitation in choosing a course of action. He said, "Mike, you need to make a decision. Just make the right one." I thought, "Well that wasn't very helpful." But really it was good advice. When I finally got my mind settled down and I went to God with it, the right decision was clear. Although it would have been much easier to take the other path, I chose the right one and it all worked out.

But sometimes the wrong choices are made that have a dire impact.

2 Kings 13:14-19 (KJV)

¹⁴ Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.

¹⁵ And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows.

¹⁶ And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands.

¹⁷ And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them.

¹⁸ And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed.

¹⁹ And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.

Joash made a choice to follow what Elisha had told him but he also decided to stop after hitting the ground with the arrows only three times. His decision was wrong and eventually the Syrians did overcome the Israelites. When we make a decision, we must stay committed to seeing it all the way through and not quit before we've received all that God has made available to us.

One time the followers of Jesus made a decision after he taught them the Word and it conflicted with what they wanted to hear.

John 6:59-68 (KJV)

⁵⁹ These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.

⁶⁰ Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?

⁶¹ When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?

⁶² What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?

⁶³ It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

⁶⁴ But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.

⁶⁵ And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

⁶⁶ From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

⁶⁷ Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

⁶⁸ Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

Some chose to walk away but Peter decided to stay. He knew the true value of what Jesus was giving them. To him, there wasn't much of a choice.

Jeremiah told Israel that they had come to a fork in the road and they needed to choose.

Jeremiah 21:8 (KJV)

⁸ And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death.

Now you may say, "Not every decision I make is life or death." I would agree. Whether you decide to eat a sandwich or a salad isn't life or death, but when we come to the things of God, even though, at times, they may seem small and insignificant, they make a difference. For example, tithing or abundant sharing. It's a godly principle. When we practice it with the proper attitude, we put our trust in God to take care of all our needs. But if we skip past it, or only do it haphazardly, we don't allow the full blessings that God can provide us. I'm sure you can think of other examples.

When we choose the path we are going to take, we must remember that Jesus told his apostles “I am the Way...” in John 14¹. There is no other way. In Proverbs it states it another way.

Proverbs 14:12 (KJV)

¹²There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

No one purposely chooses to take the path that leads to death, because they believe each and every decision they make to be right until it's too late. But we have a God who can foresee the path we need to be on and He will guide us if we only allow Him.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (KJV)

⁵Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

⁶In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

We must choose to put our trust in the Lord rather than choosing to trust our own understanding. The Bible is full of examples of choices, choices, and choices. We MUST choose. When we look at what we have to gain it's really not much of a choice.

Jack Benny, a comedian known as being tight with money, tells the story about the time he was walking down the street and a guy walks up to him and asks him for a match to light his cigarette. When Jack Benny reaches for a match, the man says, “Don't make a move. This is a stick-up.” Then the robber pulls out a gun and tells Benny, “Your money or your life.” Jack Benny stands there and doesn't respond so the robber says more strongly, “Look buddy. I said your money or your life.” Jack Benny responds, “I'm thinking it over!”

It's a funny comedy bit, but when it comes to eternal blessings and our walk with the Father, what's to think over?

Joshua knew that Israel had to make the choice for themselves. He couldn't make it for them. Each one of us must make our own choices. Our father, our mother, our spouse, our friends, none of them can make our choices for us. We must make it for ourselves. But our decision can certainly have an impact on others.

Deuteronomy 30:19 (KJV)

¹⁹I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

Moses made it clear that the path we choose can have a long-term impact on other generations. My grandmother, Vera, was a wonderful Christian woman, and so was my mother, Lois. Their decision to be Christians had an impact on me, even at a time when I didn't believe in God. Paul reminds Timothy of his spiritual heritage.

¹ John 14:6, Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:15a (KJV)

⁵When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

¹⁵And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures,

The decisions we make today can have an impact on our children, and grandchildren, and for generations to come. Each individual will need to make their own decision whether to accept Christ as their lord and savior, but it certainly doesn't hurt to raise them in fertile ground sown with an abundance of the Word.

Gary Lafleur, Canadian hockey player and five-time Stanley Cup winner, once said that each of us has only one past, but there are many futures. You can't change the past, but you can determine your destiny. Christ erases all your sins from the past. The Bible never promises us a tomorrow. We only have now. Let's resolve to make our choices as they come and to make godly, right ones. One right choice makes it easier to make another right one. Let's build a pattern in our lives so that we can receive all that God has for us.

* <https://bibilium.com/making-choices-billy-graham-sermon/> Accessed on 1/28/2023.