

Sermon for September 5: Choose Life

Based on Deuteronomy 30:15-20

We make many choices every day. Just think about the choices you had to make already today. Will I have breakfast? If so, what will I eat? What will I wear? How many times will I hit the snooze button? Will I go to church today? Our days are full of choices.

Those are just the little choices. What about the big choices? Where will I live? What will my job be? Will I get married? If so, to whom? What do I do about my kids? Our days are full of choices, and the multitude of choices that we have leads us to choose, often, to do nothing.

At the beginning of his book *The Paradox of Choice*, author Barry Schwartz describes going to the store to buy a pair of jeans. The variety of brands, styles, and colors overwhelm him. Even though he leaves with the best fitting pair of jeans he's ever owned, he still feels disappointed because of all the choices he left behind. He continues by writing "When people have no choice, life is almost unbearable. As the number of available choices increases ... the autonomy, control and liberation this variety brings are powerful and positive. But as the number of choices keeps growing, negative aspects of having a multitude of options begin to appear. As the number of choices grows further, the negatives escalate until we become overloaded. At this point, choice no longer liberates, but debilitates. It might even be said to tyrannize."

The multitude of choices we have may tyrannize us, but it is the power of choice that first let us be tyrannized. It was the choice Adam and Eve made to disobey God that brought sin and death into the world. It was the choice by Cain to kill his brother Abel that led to the first death. It was the choice of a fearful Pharaoh that led to the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt. It was the choice of Israelites who worshiped a golden calf instead of the God who freed them from Egypt that led to forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

Here at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is giving his farewell sermon to the Israelites. Waiting to enter the Promised Land, Moses reminds them of all that God had done for them, and all that God had promised to do for them. He reminds them of the covenant agreement between God and the Israelites, and what the Israelites were supposed to obey. Leaving no room for gray, Moses sets it out in black and white. Choose life, or choose death. Choose to follow God's rules, or choose to disobey. Those are the options Moses sets before the people.

The rest of the Old Testament is full of reminders of the importance of choosing life. Prophets are raised up to remind the people of God of all that they had promised to do. Wisdom literature like the book of Proverbs also laid out the two ways people could go,

choosing life or choosing death. Psalms like Psalm 1 that we read to begin our worship today served as reminders of the two ways. Yet human nature led them not to choose life, but to choose death, and the same forces are at work in us, as well.

Most of our choices are not life or death, black and white decisions. They're not big, obvious decisions like the choice faced by Spiderman near the climax of the first movie, of whether to choose to save the girl he loves or the tram car full of innocent passengers. They're not like the choice Morpheus offers Neo in the Matrix, of a blue pill or a red pill. Instead, our lives are made up of little choices. Now, they may eventually lead death, if you choose the steak over the salad every time. Little choices can become habit and can alter the trajectory of our lives. But given a choice, we're going to make the bad decision.

Choosing life or choosing death is not something that we can balance out on our own. It's not like the new Burger King commercials, where making one smart decision means that you can make one dumb decision. As much as we'd like to be able to make good decisions all of the time, we don't. The temptations of greasy fast food soon overwhelm attempts to eat better. The temptations of alcohol and parties and peer pressure challenge our attempts to do well in our studies or work. Temptations of all sorts tempt us to put things ahead of God in importance. As much as we try to choose life, we choose death.

Fortunately, the choice is not up to us. Because of all of our bad choices, all we deserve are curses and death. But when Jesus came into the world, he came to bring us life. He came to bear his cross for us. He chose death, death on a cross. He chose to take all of the curses and death that we deserve upon himself. Because Jesus chose death, we have life.

Following Jesus won't simplify the choices we have to make. In fact, following Jesus can make them more complicated. But we also know that we no longer have to make up for our dumb decisions, the times we choose death, on our own. We have Jesus. Moses set before the Israelites the choice of life or death, but wasn't with them to help them in those choices. Moses himself chose to disobey God, and died. Jesus overcame death and the grave, so that we may have life. He promises not to leave us alone or forsaken, but to be with us, to save us. What a choice He made! Thanks be to God that He did.

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