

Decisions for Disciples

Luke 6:20-26

Following sheep from oasis to oasis under the searing sun wrinkled and weathered Moses' skin. Then when he was eighty, he started serving God. Forty years later he spoke to the nation of Israel for the last time.

The old lawgiver was about to climb up Mount Nebo. There he would stare out across the river at Canaan. Then he would die.

But first he pleaded with his countrymen one last time.

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, Deuteronomy 30:19 (KJV)

That is the choice every human being faces. We can choose life, or we can choose death. But once we have chosen life, there is yet another choice: a choice that is not available to those who are yet to choose eternal life.

The choice that remains is blessing or cursing, joy or sorrow, smiles or tears. Choosing life is a one-time decision. But this is a decision we must make every day. Indeed, whether we realize it or not, we make it every hour we live.

In Moses' day, blessings flowed from obeying the myriad commandments in God's Law. And cursing came from disobeying them. But that was then, not now.

Jesus fulfilled the Law's moral requirements by perfectly keeping them: by never once disobeying even one of God's commandments. Then He fulfilled the law's ceremonial demands by shedding His blood and giving His life as sin's sacrifice.

By doing that, He freed everyone who trusts in Him from God's Law. But the choices still remain. We still choose blessing or cursing.

It is the eternal truth of God's Word that all blessings flow from our kind and compassionate Creator. That is why keeping God's Law brought blessings. Obeying God's commandments pleased the Lord and brought men into a closer relationship with Him. And when we are close to our Creator, blessings are inevitable.

Luke wrote that Jesus looked at His disciples when He spoke these words. He did that because the truths He taught concern blessings every believer should seek and woes they should shun.

They are an instruction manual for living close to Christ.

Our Attitudes

Much has changed since Moses' day. But one thing has not. Blessings still flow from the presence of God.

However, since the Savior purchased salvation with His blood, those blessings are not dependent upon outward works. Now our inward attitudes affect whether our life will be a delight or a dirge.

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Verse 20

Matthew added two words Luke left out: in spirit. Jesus was speaking about empty hearts, not empty pockets and empty pantries. He was talking how we see ourselves spiritually.

And our Savior said we are to see ourselves as spiritually empty and morally impoverished. Only when we realize the truth that we are utterly and absolutely without any redeeming quality, is the reign and rule of our eternal Lord open to us.

To draw near to God, we must have humble hearts and realize we have nothing to offer Him but remorse, regret and repentance. Our Lord hates lies. And no lie is more monstrous than pride.

So God shuns us when we are so full of pride, we entertain the foolish fantasy that we really are not imperfect and absolutely without merit. We do, pride says, have some redeeming qualities that make us attractive to a holy God.

But God is truth. And He dwells only with those who live in the truth and realize how spiritually impoverished they really are.

...thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." Isaiah 57:15

...to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word. Isaiah 66:2

But merely knowing our need is not enough. We must also hate what we are and genuinely mourn that we are so weak and wayward, so selfish and sinful.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Verse 21

If we who love and live for Jesus Christ hunger for more of His presence, He will satisfy us by drawing ever nearer to us. But we must never lose the hard edge of hunger for more of His holy presence in our lives. If we do, we drift away from His presence. And that always brings dissatisfaction and despair.

Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Verse 25

No matter how long we serve our Lord or how close our communion with Him might be, we must never be content. We must always seek and strive to draw ever closer to Him.

Just as He earnestly desires to draw closer to us

Our Appetites

Jesus also warned His disciples against craving what this world has to offer. The reason is simple yet stern. If we hunger for riches in this world, we necessarily forfeit riches with God.

So we must never give God financial gifts merely to reap His blessings. Yes, God will faithfully remember His promises to bless those who give. But when we are motivated by greed, we turn our backs upon infinitely more precious blessings God would give us. So while we think we are gaining, we are really losing.

We must never seek and savor the sensual pleasures this world offers, either. We cannot feed such desires and still be in close communion with Christ's Spirit. We must choose one or the other.

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, Galatians 5:17

Feeding our flesh is focusing our desires upon what we can gain in this world. And that sets us in opposition to the God who loves us and desires nothing but the best for us.

...the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Romans 8:7-8

When our desire is for human pleasure here and now, we are turning our backs upon God. So we cannot help but forfeit His bountiful blessings.

But our appetites also include emotional and psychological desires. And from the beginning, that placed those who claim Christ's name in a difficult and dangerous position.

When we choose to trust in Jesus, we are turning our backs upon everything this world treasures. And our Lord warned us that the people of this world heap hatred and hostility upon us when we do that.

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. John 15:18-19

Christ counseled His disciples not to be alarmed and overwhelmed by the ugliness and abuse ungodly men aim at them. We are not to mourn that this world hates us; we are to rejoice.

Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. Verses 22-23

Some months after Jesus returned to Heaven, Peter and John stood in the shadows of Solomon's Porch on the temple courtyard to tell worshipers about Jesus' resurrection and redemption through His blood. And that angered the temple rulers.

So they sent soldiers clattering out onto the courtyard to arrest the former fishermen. Then they stood them before the assembled Sanhedrin and demanded that all such preaching stop.

Peter and John quietly and calmly refused. So the ruling Jews had the two men beaten thirty-nine times with a leather whip. But the vicious beating did not discourage Peter and John. Far from it, they were not even angry or upset. They were delighted.

...they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. Acts 5:41

While the wounds on their backs were still fresh and painful, Peter and John actually rejoiced. They wisely and rightly understood that hostility from people who hate Jesus is a sign saints are walking close to Christ.

Neither were they discouraged that important and powerful people treated them as enemies. That did not bother them because they were not seeking to please men. Their only aim was to please the Lord who loved them.

In the end, that is our choice. We must decide whom we want to please: God or men. And Paul wrote that we cannot serve our Savior if we choose the latter.

...am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10

Paul understood that he could not do both. He could not seek to please men and also honor God at the same time.

And we cannot either. We must choose one or the other.

Our Aims

Throughout Christ's counsel to His disciples, two opposing ideas are set in contrast to one another. Again and again, Jesus spoke of those whose affections, appetites and attention are focused upon the here and now. Our Lord contrasted that with choosing to focus upon eternity and God's glorious kingdom.

And the pattern in Christ's teaching is always the same. The two never agree. When one is positive, the other is negative; when one is negative, the other is positive. And we are left with an eternal choice all men must make.

On one hand we can choose to be poor now, to weep and mourn now, and to endure hatred and hostility now. Or we can be rich now, at ease and in comfort now, satisfied and well liked now.

We must choose one or the other. We can seek treasure and triumph, riches and respect, pleasure and plenty now in this life, here in this world of men. Or we can consciously and confidently seek all those blessing and rewards in another, eternal world.

Yes, we do have the right to choose which we will value: now or later, man or God, earth or heaven. But we cannot choose the results of our decision.

Those results are set in stone. If we are poor in spirit now, we will be rich with God, both now and later. If we weep and mourn over our own emptiness and iniquity now, we shall laugh later.

If we hunger for more and more of our Master's presence in our lives now, we will be satisfied, both now and later. And if we are willing to be hated by men now, we will be honored by our great and glorious God in His shining, celestial city.

Those blessings are eternal and endless. But do not be deceived. They are not a reward for righteousness. They are an eternal inheritance, which Peter said is reserved for us in Heaven.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 1 Peter 1:3-4

Both the aim and the results of refusing to seek such spiritual blessings are exact opposites of what our Savior seeks for us.

We can choose to be rich and satisfy ourselves with what this world offers during our fleeting days here on earth. But if we do we will not only endure an aimless hunger in our hearts now. We will also endure an endless eternity of unfulfilled desires and grinding poverty after we die.

We can laugh our way through life and find all our fulfillment in what this world has to offer. But the Bible repeatedly reminds us that we will never really attain the pleasures we desire. And like a short summer, our lives here on earth will soon be over.

Then we will be faced with unnumbered eons in the darkness and despair, the agony and the horror of hell. And we will not be afforded a moment of relief.

Finally, we can choose to please other human beings during our short stay on this earth. But we will find them fickle and difficult to please for more than fleeting moments now and then.

However, we cannot hunger for human appreciation without also ignoring God. Then one day we will find ourselves drowning in pain and problems. And in desperation, we will cry out to our Creator. But He will not answer.

Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; and you neglected all my counsel and did not want my reproof; I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, when your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then

they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me, Proverbs 1:24-28

One day soon our hearts will flutter, skip and stop. Then we will finally realize how foolish we were. God gave us an eternal choice. And like Martha, we chose the lesser part.

In the end, the choice is unavoidable. We must choose earth or heaven, ourselves or the Savior.

We cannot even avoid it all be simply refusing to choose. Seeking the riches of Christ must be a conscious decision. So refusing to make a decision is in itself a decision.

Our loving Lord is already on record. In His Word He has recorded how He would have us to choose. Moses said it best.

Choose life!