

“Costly Choices”

“... for he is your life and length of days ...” (Deuteronomy 30:20b).

Many of you are aware that Pastor Eggold and I do a weekly, virtual Bible study on the readings for the upcoming weekend. This is something we started a couple years ago and have continued to offer as one possible option for people to be engaged in Bible study during the week. We’ve had fun creating these studies and try to keep things interesting for viewers by changing the locations of where we record or the backgrounds during our recording if we do a Zoom recording.

This past week, we recorded our study via Zoom and again we used different backgrounds for our own entertainment and we always hope that others find the backgrounds entertaining as well. During this week’s study “Emmanuel’s organ”, the “Brady Bunch” and “The Price Is Right” all showed up as backgrounds during the study. Now, I have a confession to make, not every background we use actually applies directly to the texts we’re studying, but sometimes they do. And in this past week’s study one that tied in more than we might have realized is the “The Price Is Right” reference.

The show, “The Price Is Right”, at its most basic level is all about knowing the correct cost of different items. And at times, some of the prizes may have some very substantial costs. The large costs of the prizes become most clear at the end of the show with the final showcases for the last two contestants. While the final prizes often carry big costs in dollars, the showcase round carries another weighty cost for the contestant with the honor of going first. After both remaining contestants see the first showcase and before any guesses are given to the actual cost of the items, the contestant who has won the honor of going first, has to choose whether or not to keep the first showcase which is visible and known or pass it on to the other contestant with the hope that the second showcase – that is still unknown behind a door – is a better prize than what was just passed over. Sometimes the risky choice of taking the second showcase pays off and sometimes it doesn’t. No matter what that first contestant chooses, there is still only one winner, the contestant who guesses closest to the actual price of his or her showcase. As any game show should, “The Price Is Right”, saves its most costly choices for the end building suspense and anticipation for one last entertaining moment of television.

Our readings from Deuteronomy and Luke also reveal to us some very costly choices that God sets before His people. While these readings tell us about things that happened well before the show, “The Price Is Right” existed, God’s people addressed in these readings have played with God’s Word and choice in a way very similar to this modern-day game show. The basic choice God’s people face in both readings is whether or not to listen to and follow God’s Word. As these two readings reveal, both options carry significant costs.

Let’s consider the Deuteronomy reading for a moment. The people of Israel, God’s people, have been rescued from slavery in Egypt. They had witnessed God’s mighty protection as He led them safely away from the Egyptian army through the Red Sea on dry land. After wandering in the desert for many years, they are now on the verge of entering the Promised Land. But before they enter, Moses, as he is wrapping up his tenure as Israel’s leader, shares again with this new generation of Israelites the teaching and instructions that the Lord had given to him. The culmination of these words from the Lord is this choice between life and death, good and evil, between holding fast to God as their life and length of days or clinging to some idol or false god and bringing upon themselves God’s punishment and wrath.

For a moment, as other parts of the Bible share with us, Israel did choose life. Led by Joshua into the Promised Land, they had the intention that they and their households would serve the Lord and Him only. However, as the days and years wore on, their resolve to choose life diminished and instead of listening to God’s warnings that they were straying, Israel entered into that endless cycle of idolatry only to stop when God intervened with punishment only to revert back to their idolatrous ways again. Until finally God had to exile this idolatrous people from the land He had promised to them and for years He went silent.

Then after years of silence, the Lord God broke His silence by sending, His Son, Jesus to engage His people whom He had slowly brought back into the Promise Land. That’s where our reading from Luke picks up. And in this reading, we’re faced with a lot of similarities, the same God, the same choice and the same

idolatrous people. However, this time around, Jesus had to share the same choice by talking about the cost of discipleship, the true cost of following Him. You see, this idolatrous people of God, had switched from clinging to the idols of the nations around them to clinging to the idol of their own actions, believing that they could do their part in order to continually please God and earn His favor.

The people of Israel in Jesus' day believed that they were choosing life by living their lives according to the rules and standards that they had invented. And the impact from these man-made standards, was that this nation was convinced that a true follower of God looked like that of the Pharisees, scribes and other religious leaders. While these religious leaders should have been worthy examples of followers of God, the cost of discipleship they portrayed wasn't even enough. Rather, Jesus compares even the supposedly best disciples Israel had to offer to salt that somehow has lost its saltiness. The cost of discipleship that Israel was choosing was worthless, it was still the choice of death and evil.

Now this weekend, you and I face a similar situation as our readings from Deuteronomy and Luke. The same God is setting before us the same choice between following Him or leaving Him, between listening to His Word or ignoring it, between good and evil, life and death. While we might not be completely the same nationality as the people of Israel, we certainly do share the same idolatrous nature as them. Nowadays, we've grown bolder in our idolatry, for as we weigh the costs of this choice in this present time, we do take the costs seriously to the point that we regularly say following God isn't worth the cost anymore.

Curbing our desires for things that aren't ours, whether it be our neighbor's money, possessions or family members, isn't worth it any longer. The god we choose to follow, wants us to be happy, so we choose what makes us happy. Or we are choosing to give into arguments, reasons and emotions that diminish and destroy the God-given value to human life whether it's with the unborn, elderly, disabled, sexually confused, etc. hiding behind some devilish thought that we know better than God's revealed Word. Or even our choices to prioritize our days and weeks with everything but time for worship and study of God's Word has become our not so subtle attempt at discipleship. Well, as Jesus Words still inform us, our version of discipleship doesn't cover the cost. It doesn't measure up. We like Israel, the people of God before us, have strayed and instead of life, we have chosen evil and death. Right now, we must admit our failures, realizing that these choices of evil and death are far costlier than we could ever fathom.

Mercifully, the same God who came to Israel's rescue time and time again has also come to our rescue this day as well. Jesus came to be the disciple that we cannot be and to pay the cost for our poor choices of evil and death. We are restored as true followers of God because He, Jesus, God's own Son, has stood as the chief of sinners in our place. Jesus' life of perfect obedience – refraining from temptation, valuing and defending life as God ordained it, honoring and treasuring God's Word as God intended – covers our lives of disobedience. His death upon the cross forgives our failures. And His resurrection restores our future hope leading us to live lives renewed by His grace desiring His intended purpose and will.

He who was Israel's life and length of days, remains our life and length of days even now. He who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, is present with us by the Holy Spirit to daily guide and direct us to choose life, to love, obey and hold fast to His Word. By His Word, He leads us to curb and repent from our sinful desires; He guides us to firmly defend and value human life, as He created it, with all gentleness and respect; He moves us to continually remain in Him, in His Word and Work, even as He remains in us. And He who has promised us life everlasting will make good on His promise when He returns.

My dear friends in Christ, as we daily face the choice between life and death, good and evil, between following and holding onto our Lord and Savior or letting go and forgetting Him, may we know that the cost of life, the cost of following Jesus is worth it because He is our life and length of days. He has already chosen us for Himself, that's why He made us, that's why He died and rose for us and that's why He's coming again for us. And He is faithful to see us through the cost of following Him this side of heaven so that we might follow Him into heaven for all eternity. Depart in life and peace, O chosen ones of God. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan