

## CHOICES

Matthew 7:13-14

In the 1930s, as Adolf Hitler grew in power, the German people faced some incredible choices: They could go along with the propaganda movement of national pride, of power and of economic growth or they could resist a horrible evil dictator that made himself into a godlike figure. Sadly, many of the German people chose the more comfortable path, the selfish path that benefited themselves at the time.

The Christian church existed in Germany, but where were they? The very church that is called to stand in the path of evil— the church that God entrusted as the holders of the truth — they remained silent. Pastors and Priests alike altered their message, their doctrines and even safeguarded the members of the Nazi party to avoid conflict with the Nazi regime.

There was one Christian man who decided he was not going to remain silent. His name was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a brilliant young pastor and theologian who saw what many were not willing to admit: that Hitler's power and ideology were not just political problems — they were spiritual problems. Evil was parading as good, and God's people were being deceived.

Bonhoeffer faced a decision that he needed to make that had the highest consequences imaginable to it. He could stay safe, avoid controversy and stay out of the eyes of those who were in power. Or he could speak the truth of God's Word, even if it meant prison, suffering, and death. And he chose faithfulness over safety. He didn't cower down and say "We will leave politics over there, that is not our business" NO...

He helped lead the Confessing Church, a movement that resisted the compromise of the gospel. He trained young pastors to hold fast to Christ, even when it was unpopular. Eventually, he was arrested for his resistance and placed in prison. In April 1945, just weeks before the war ended, Bonhoeffer was executed. His last recorded words were: "This is the end — but for me, the beginning of life."

- Bonhoeffer's story is not just history. It's a reminder that every one of us face **choices** — maybe not as dramatic, but just as real.
  - Have you ever thought of what you might have done had you lived in that time?
    - Will we follow the easy path of comfort, popularity, and compromise? Or will we choose the narrow way of faithfulness to Christ, especially when there is a cost attached to it?
  
- Jesus said clearly in Matthew 7:13–14:
  - “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to **destruction**, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to **life**, and there are few who find it.
  - Can we comprehend that most of the people born since the beginning of creation are not going to end up in heaven?
  
- The story I just conveyed about Bonhoeffer was less than 100 years ago. We are not talking about a distant past but something that happened during the lifetime of some people we may know.
  
- Let's go through some examples in our bible, of people who had to make **choices** and see what we can learn from them.
  - Adam and Eve had everything good that you could possibly want.
    - Not a single goat head to get stuck in their feet, it was never too hot or too cold, and the water was crystal clear.
      - Yet, a thought entered into their minds that God was holding back something from them.
      - They had no way to compare what was good and what was evil.

- They just chose to believe a lie rather than the truth of God.
  - Have we ever believed that God was “Holding out” something from us?
- Let’s talk about Job for a minute.
  - Whenever I think about Job, it just reminds me of how weak I am.
  - Do you know what Job went through?
    - Job 1:13-22
- Did Job respond that way? No... what did he do?
  - Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and **worshiped**. And he said:
    - “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.”
      - In all this Job did not sin nor **charge God with wrong**.
- Has any of us ever had that bad a day? But wait, there is more! Job’s problems were not quite over yet!
- Next thing we see is Ms. Job jumps in and gives Job some advice: Job, you just need to “curse God and die!”
  - What was Job’s response to her?
    - Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?
  - Let’s look at ourselves in this. Are we living under the lie that nothing bad happens to good people?
    - How would we handle it if we were to get a bad diagnosis from the doctor?

- What would our reaction be if suddenly we were to lose our job?
  - Or perhaps our children were to get hurt or ended up going down a very bad path?
    - Do we abandon God or draw closer to Him?
- Has the prosperity gospel message affected us in that way?
  - As Christians, we must understand that this life will be hard, it has many trials and as Jesus said – difficult is the way.
    - If your life is too easy, then you might want to examine yourself and ask if you have compromised yourself in some way verses what God wants from you.
- We can make the **choice** to trust when the bible says that “This life is but a vapor”.
  - Do we believe that?
    - Have you ever heard “This too shall pass?”
    - When we do, then we can make the commitment that we can endure until Jesus calls us to our real and permanent home.
- In Chapter 13 Job goes on and says in what I would consider the most “Given over to God” statement in the bible– “Though He slay me, I will trust in Him.
- The only other person I know that had that much integrity would be Joseph when he went through all he endured to say at the end
  - “What you meant for evil, God meant for good”
    - Speaking of the mistreatment from his brothers.
- What kind of faith does it take to be like Job or Joseph?
  - How can we show that kind of strength under pressure?

- Folks, the only way that happens is that we must be completely sold out for Jesus.
  - You may be thinking “I would like to do that, but I don’t know how”
- There are missionaries all over the world today that I would say are “All IN” for their faith.
  - Living day by day, sometimes minute by minute, not knowing where the next meal is coming from or who is after them.
- There are people dying every day in places like North Korea, China, Iran and all over the Middle East because they are more committed to Jesus than their own personal safety.
- You may be saying “Well, that is not me, I am not called to go do that kind of work”
  - If you can say that, then you are probably correct in your thinking.
    - But make no mistake, you are called.
  - When Jesus said “You are to take up your cross daily and follow Him”, what do we think He meant?
    - You may have heard it said that the mission field is anywhere outside of the church doors, and that is indeed true.
      - Our mission field can and should be the place where God has placed us.
        - in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in Rio Rancho and in the State of New Mexico.
      - Can all of us agree that those places need Jesus?
- The problem then is that it is our calling, it is just something we **choose** not to participate in?

- Let's talk about those who at one time were totally committed, then lost their zeal.
  - The one that represents this the most in my eyes is King David
  - That very one who is "The Apple of God's eye"
  - The brave boy that fought lions and bears.
  - He stood in front of a massive, scary Goliath as a brave soldier of God, and said
    - "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defiled"
- That very same champion of God, years later, got comfortable being the king. He got lazy and idleness took him.
  - It says in 2 Samuel 11 that David stayed home while everyone went to battle.
  - In verse 2 of that chapter, it says that in the **evening** David arose from his bed.
    - He got up and walked around on his roof and he fell into the trap that was set for him.
      - David saw Bathsheba bathing and while he should have said "Whoa" I need to get away from this, but he said "Wow" and the problems started.
      - David had a **choice**, and he set himself up to make the wrong one.
      - We know the story, he took Bathsheba that day and laid with her.
        - Did God just allow David to get away with this sin?
        - NO, of course she ends up pregnant, while her husband is away in battle.
  - David had a **choice** to do good or not do good.

- Within a very short amount of time, David became lazy, he became an adulterer, a murderer who had to scheme his way around to try to cover up that sin.
  - What were the consequences of David's sin?
    - Bathsheba's husband was killed
    - The child born of that affair died
    - A loss of trust among the people. (Do I have to lock up my wife when we go to war?)
    - A kingdom was divided (Israel and Judah) and
    - Turmoil came to his own house.
- That is a hefty price to pay for a little pleasure.
  - What started David down that sinful path?
    - Proverbs 24:33-34
      - A little sleep, a little slumber,  
A little folding of the hands to rest;  
So shall your poverty come like a prowler.....
- I don't want us to think that the problem David had was just his problem.
  - All of us are subject to being captured by idleness.
    - Sometimes with the same consequences that David experienced.
- Allow me to give you a scenario that happens way too often.
  - In our modern-day world, when an abundance of free time is found, we end up in front of a computer screen.
    - Next thing you know, something comes up that you either didn't expect or you thought "I will just take a glance"
      - And instead of saying "Whoa" and running away, you say "Wow" and the hook is set.

- Lust dims our ability to think properly.
  - The results of poor **choices**, many times end up with a pregnancy as a result.
    - Out of shame, embarrassment, financial hardship, or you are not ready for a family....
      - What happens?
      - A **choice** has to be made.
        - You many find themselves at an abortion clinic.
        - A baby dies.
        - And a part of that mom and dad die as well.
- To open the eyes of our youth to this reality, we are going to take them and as many of the adults as we can to an abortion clinic in Albuquerque next weekend as a part of our Love Life event to see what that looks like.
  - To some young people the thought of ever having an abortion is not even a consideration until they find themselves in a bad spot.
  - The reason I want these young people to be involved is so that they can set in their hearts now how to make good **choices**.
    - All of us understand that bad **choices** can have bad consequences.
    - Setting our minds beforehand on what you will allow and not allow prevents bad **choices**.
- Jesus asked us to take up our cross and follow Him.
  - You don't take up your cross by watching more football games, or owning more cars or getting a bigger house or getting that promotion at work.



- You pick up your cross daily by saying “I **choose** to follow Jesus today”
  - He will no longer be in third place or second place, only in first place.
  - Be like Joshua in Joshua 24:15 when he said “**Choose** this day who you will follow.....As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”
  - Don’t be like the rich, young ruler who asked Jesus “What must I do to inherit eternal life” and in the book of Mark it says Jesus loved him and kindly said to him....Just say these carefully constructed words and you will end up in heaven.... NO... that is not what He said at all.
    - He told the rich young ruler that anything in his life that was more important than Him had to be removed.
    - Jesus gave him a **choice** – It is either Me or the money.
      - You cannot love the things of this world and love Jesus at the same time.
      - “Sell all you have and follow Me” is what Jesus asked of this man.
- Have you ever trembled at the thought of “What if Jesus asked me to do that same thing?”
- Would you do it?
  - If I did that, everyone would think I had lost my mind.
- Let me tell you, that is exactly what He asks of us
  - What if he asked you to give up your job that you have been at for so long and had worked so hard for?
  - What if he asks you to move away from your family and friends?
    - From paradise to the poor house?
      - Would you do it?

- I'm not saying that we have to go out and sell everything or quit our jobs, but I am saying if Jesus asks us to, then we need to be ready and willing to do so.
- I've always loved that Jesus never made it easy on anyone to become a follower of His.
  - It's a very exclusive club and only the right kind of people are allowed in.
  - Who are those that are invited in?
    - You must have proof that you belong in the club.
      - Proof that you are a true believer.
        - What is that proof?
          - Ephesians 1:13 says "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were **sealed** with the Holy Spirit of promise."
- You must be sealed with the Holy Spirit!
  - Upon your confession that Jesus is Your Lord and a sincere belief that He was raised from the dead, He marked you as His.
  - You belong to Him
- Next, He asks that we love Him
  - How does that work?
    - Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments"
      - The first sign of love is obedience.

- He asks for loyalty to Him
  - In Matthew 6:24 Jesus said “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”
  - Have you ever heard that our God is a jealous God?
    - Listen to what He had to say to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4:23-24
      - Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.
        - He is not willing to share you with anyone or anything else.
- What about those who are not sealed?
  - In the book of Revelation, God gives us a list of the types of people who will **not** get in.
  - Revelation 21:8 says “But the **cowardly**, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”
    - I find it fascinating that cowards were picked before the unbelieving were.
      - These are people who would have known the truth but were too much of a coward to stand for Jesus.

- The rest of the list is easy to grasp but have you ever thought about those who would deny Jesus in front of men? What does it say Jesus would do?
    - He would deny them in front of His Father.
- Jesus, in His mercy and grace, gives us the **choice**
  - Luke 9:23 Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, **let him deny himself**, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”
    - As we mentioned earlier, **choices** come with consequences.
      - The scariest verses in the bible are contained in Matthew 7:23-24. It reads “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”
- There will be a day when Jesus comes on the clouds, and the trumpet will blast, and He will call His church, His bride to come home to Him.
  - We know that day is close,
    - Jesus is waiting at the door for the Father to tell Him to go get His bride.
    - And when that happens, those who are His will go home to Him.
- But there are others, those that were convinced that on that day, they would be called as well.
  - Those that believed they were good people
  - Those who thought their good works would save them.

- Those who may have grown up in a Christian home and thought that would save them.