



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
Church of Hamilton

“Making Wise Decisions”

by Rev. Jeremy A. McKeen

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HEBREWS 11:24–27

Please turn with me in your Bibles today to the book of Hebrews and our text today is Hebrews 11:24–27. And as you may have already seen in your bulletin, the subject I want us to consider on this first Sunday and first day of the New Year is the subject of decision making. How do you and I make wise decisions? When we come to a fork the road, how do we make a good choice? How do we make good choices in life?

Some of you, I know, just this past week have faced incredibly difficult decisions—financial decisions, family decisions, health decisions, decisions that affect not only yourself, but others as well, and so how do we do that well? Are there any guiding principles that can apply to all of us regardless of the type of decision that we need to make? This is what I want to look at in our time together this morning. And my prayer as we look at this insightful summary of Moses’ decision making, is that God would use this wonderful little passage to profoundly shape the everyday decisions we’re called on to make.

Read Text: Hebrews 11:24–27

“You must choose, but choose wisely.” Remember this line? As a child of the 80’s, I’ll never forget it. Many of you are familiar with these iconic words from one of the finest films ever made—*Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.

“You must choose but choose wisely.” It’s from the Holy Grail scene when Indiana and the antagonists in the story are faced with the life-and-death decision of which cup to choose. Now thankfully the vast majority of the decisions we have to make in life are not that drastic, but I’d like to suggest that that line should be continually ringing in our ears when we think about decision making, “You must choose, but choose wisely.”

I say that because the reality is, we must choose. Think about it—there came a point in Moses’ life when he had to choose. “Am I going to identify with the people of Pharaoh or the people of God? I have to decide. Am I going to stay where it’s comfortable in Egypt, or be a part of God’s great rescue mission? I have to choose.” You see, to not make a choice was to make a choice. He had no choice but to make a choice. Some people try as hard as they can to avoid making decisions. Maybe you have a friend or family member who tends to be very indecisive. A lot of times it’s because they’re paralyzed by the fear of making the wrong choice.

But as Christians we don’t have to be afraid of making decisions. With a true understanding of Jesus and the heart of God, we never have to fear getting it wrong. Here’s what I mean—

Several years ago I had the opportunity to interview author and podcaster Eric Metaxas. He was giving a presentation on his biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. And I asked him, “In your study of Bonhoeffer’s life was there something that changed your life, a lesson that you learned from him that really stuck out to you and impacted you?” And he said it was Bonhoeffer’s understanding of risk and decision making. Drawing upon Jesus’ parable of the talents, Bonhoeffer said that one of the worst things that we can think about God is that he’s harsh, that he’s cruel, that he’s the type of Master who’s just waiting for us to make a wrong decision so he can punish us and hold it over us for good. Not at all. Jesus is the Master of grace.

And as believers whose righteousness before God is not our own but the perfect righteousness of Jesus that’s been credited to me, we make our decisions in an atmosphere of grace. We make our decisions before a God of grace without any fear of condemnation or losing his love. But as we know, our choices still have consequences. No condemnation doesn’t mean no consequences. Our choices matter. And so how do we choose wisely? That’s the question before us. And what I’d like to do in the time we have is look at the decision making of Moses and draw out just a few decision-making hacks that we can see in these verses, three decision-making principles that we see operating in Moses’ life that we can apply to our lives as well.

1. Make Your Decisions by Faith in God: Moses teaches us, and in fact this whole chapter teaches us, that we should make our conscious and deliberate decisions by faith in God. What do we see here? How did Moses decide? What was the foundational driving principle in his decision making? We’re told right here, beginning of verse 24—By faith. How did he choose this over that? By faith. Same thing in verse 27. By faith he left Egypt. Now, faith in what? Faith in faith? No. Faith in himself, in his own intuition and feelings? No. Faith in God. What is Christian faith? It’s taking God at his Word. It’s trusting your life under the authority of God. This is what this entire chapter is about.

But before we go any further, listen, I get it, I realize in our culture today, the word *authority* and the whole notion of trusting in and submitting to some other authority besides yourself, despite how you feel is like committing cultural heresy today. But think about it—regardless of your religious commitments, you do this all the time. All of us in trying to make good decisions are going look to some authority on the subject, whether it’s a trusted news source, a trustworthy author, or some noted authority on the subject. We all know that if we want to receive the best type of guidance, the best type of direction, we’ve got to go to someone and submit to someone who’s in the know, someone who’s an expert in the field. And friend, listen, there’s no one more in the know than God himself. There’s no greater authority on the subject of life than the Designer of life himself. You see each one of us—again regardless of your views on religion and spirituality—each of us make our deliberate decisions by faith in some authority—is it faith in your intuition? Faith in your feelings or your friends? Faith in the popular opinion? We’re all basing our decisions upon faith in some authority. And we need to ask ourselves, what is it for me? Moses teaches us that wise decision making is based upon faith in God’s authority.

All right, but what does that mean? What does that practically look like? Well, the first thing that we need to see is that faith in God’s authority doesn’t mean that just you check your brain at the door. Faith isn’t some superstitious irrational leap into the dark. No. The Bible doesn’t say we walk by faith and not by reason. It says we walk by faith and not by sight. That there’s insights we’re given that go beyond what we see. Look at the very beginning of verse 26. What does it say? “He considered.” It means Moses thought it out. He looked at all the facts and he made a calculated decision—all right, but what did he calculate? How did he calculate by faith? What does it mean to make our decisions by faith in God? You could say it’s calculating in both the reality of God and the revelation of God—that God exists, and that he is not silent.

We've got to understand that Moses wasn't flying by the seat of his pants and how he just felt in the moment. No, faith decisions are calculated decisions. You see, it was most likely based on what God had already revealed to his people.

Listen to this—Several generations before Moses was born, God had foretold that his people would be in Egypt and that he would come and deliver them out. In Genesis 15:13–14, this is what God promised Abraham. He said, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs—this is Egypt—and will be servants there and they will be afflicted for 400 years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.” And then years later God reiterates the same promise to Jacob as he was debating whether or not to go into Egypt. In Genesis 46:3, God tells Jacob, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again . . .” And then at the very end of Genesis, in Genesis 50:24—what does Joseph say to his brothers? “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

See, what did Moses have? We have to believe that he had heard these promises about God's deliverance of his own Hebrew people out of the land of Egypt. What did Moses have? Not wishful thinking. Not faith in faith. He had the two main things that are the undergirding of all Christian faith—the reality of God and the revelation of God—and letting that be our authority. This is Christian faith. It's taking the reality of God and the revelation of God that he's given to us and putting that in the decision-making equation. This is Christian faith and this is Christian discipleship. Disciple making is helping people with decision making . . . helping our children, helping our friends and one another to make decisions upon those two great building blocks of life—the reality and the revelation of God—the authority of God.

All right, but again what does this look like in our everyday decision making today?

Before we move on, let me just give you a series of questions that I've found incredibly helpful for me personally that can sort of operate as a decision-making matrix in our lives. 1. Am I making this conscious decision before God? In other words, am I aware that God is aware and that he cares about what I do? 2. Is this decision consistent with the promises and ethical principles that God has revealed to me in his Word? 3. Can I make this decision with a clear conscience that I believe this pleases God? 4. Will this decision put the good character of God on display for others to see? 5. Will this decision help me to love others more effectively? 6. Will this decision increase my joy in God? 7. Can this decision be set up as an example for other people to follow? And listen, this doesn't happen overnight. This takes time. It takes time to cultivate and develop the habit of making decisions under God's authority. But that's what we see Moses doing.

2. Make Your Decisions by Factoring in the End at the Beginning: This is the second principle we see. What are we told in verse 25? That he had a decision to make—either he could enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin—or be mistreated with the eternal family of God and enjoy the long-lasting pleasure of following Christ and identifying with Christ. You see, either he was going to live in the light of the present, or in the light of the future, but he couldn't choose both. By choosing one he was inevitably refusing the other.

And we see this principle of wisdom in many different areas of life, don't we? Are we going to live for the moment and enjoy the fleeting pleasure of just lounging for another hour on the couch? Or are we going to factor in all the future health benefits of getting up and exercising or working on some project that needs to get done? You see, what's going to make us feel better in the end? We see the same principle in eating and exercising, in studying, in working, in dating, and handling our finances. And it's the same with who we're going to follow in life and align ourselves with. Are we going to refuse to stand with Jesus, so that we can enjoy the affirmation and attractions of the world? Or are we going to be wise and consider where all this is heading?

What are we told? That Moses chose mistreatment. He chose to bear the temporary reproach of Christ over the treasures of Egypt. This is incredible to me. This is amazing! I'm so encouraged and motivated by this man. I can't even begin to fathom the difficulty of this decision. Here's a young man at the crossroads of his life with his entire future in front of him and you realize what he gave up? As the son of Pharaoh's daughter, he would have been in line to become one of the next pharaohs of Egypt, the most powerful person in the richest country of his day. But he refused. How? Why? Because he was factoring in the end at the beginning. He knew it was only a matter of time before God intervened and delivered his people, and he wanted to be a part of that. He knew that the long-lasting reward of obedience is greater than the momentary pleasures of disobedience. You see, sin looks like life but it ends in death. And obedience looks like death, but it ends in life. It ends with a greater intimacy and fellowship with God. This was the true riches that Moses wanted.

And I find it very interesting that we're told specifically earlier in verse 24 that he did this when he was grown up. Because we all know, what's one of the key marks of being childish? It's living only for the moment. It's impulsiveness. I mean how many times have you seen a child, when they're given the choice, "Would you like to have this now or more of this a week from now?" How many times have you heard, "Yeah, I think I'll wait." No, nine times out of ten, maybe ten times out of ten, they're going to say, "Let me have it now. I want it now. I want it now. I want an Oompa Loompa now, Daddy!" What is that? It's the mark of immaturity. And isn't this the mantra of our culture today? Without God in the equation, without a vision of a greater future and eternal community to be a part of and the deeper lasting pleasures of obedience, all we're left with are the fleeting pleasures of Egypt that are here today and gone tomorrow.

I mean, why are we here today still talking about Moses? So many years later and we're still talking about this man, still thinking about his life and learning from his life. It's because he made the

best of all possible decisions. And how did he do it? He factored in the end at the beginning. What are the names of Egypt's "Who's Who" in Moses' day? Who was the outspoken one in the crowd in the Egyptian Academy that probably gave Moses a hard time? They're completely forgotten. But not this man. And this brings us to the third and final principle.

3. Make Your Decisions by Focusing on the Opinion that Matters Most: Make your decisions by faith in God, by factoring in the end at the beginning, and by focusing on the opinion that matters most. It's amazing if we stop and think about it how much people's opinions of us factor in to what we're going to say or do in life. "But Moses . . . Moses, Moses, Moses, I mean C'mon!! What is Pharaoh going to think? Is this the way that you're going to treat his daughter and all they've done for you? What are they going to say about you if you disown them like this? Aren't you afraid of what a person with that type of power can do?"

But what does this say? "Not being afraid of the anger of the king!" How? "He endured as seeing him who is invisible." What gave this man courage? What gave him the courage to make the decision that wasn't popular? What gave him the courage to make the decision that wasn't easy? It was seeing with the eyes of faith the reality of the invisible Christ, the true King, the ultimate King. And it was his opinion, Christ's opinion, that became the life-shaping vision of Moses' heart. This was the King that Moses had a forward-looking faith in. And this is the true King that, as we know, has finally come. This is Jesus. The King who has shown us once and for all that his kingship and kingdom is one of grace. Grace for sinners. Grace for people like me and you, and for people like Moses who don't always make the wise and right decisions.

Why should you follow this King? Did you notice something that's missing here? There's nothing written here about the murder Moses committed. There's nothing about Moses' murder or Moses' temper. Why not?

Because Jesus is the King who came to bear on the cross the full judgment and shame for all our poor decisions. This is the King, as I've heard it said, who when you fail him, will completely forgive you and when you find Him and follow Him, will deeply fulfill you. This is the King who forgives and forgets all our poor decisions and who remembers and celebrates every cup of cold water given in His name, every decision that we've made by faith. And I believe if Moses could step up on this platform today, he would say, "I've made a lot of bad decisions in my life as well, but trusting in God and following Christ isn't one of them.

And as we look into another year and are bombarded with a number of difficult decisions, if we're going to make wise decisions in the things that we stand for and the things that we say or not say, do or not do, we need a renewed vision of the crucified, risen and reigning Christ, the one whose opinion matters most.

And I'll just close with this. These principles can help us a great deal, but what do we do when the way isn't clear or even when we think it's clear but we're not sure what decision to make? One of the prayers that I frequently go back to that I have printed in my study can really help with this. I'll summarize it now as we close: "God, I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following Your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I pray I will never do anything apart from that desire. I

know You will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost . . . I will not fear, for You are ever with me, and You will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.. Amen."