



LIFE'S GREATEST DECISIONS

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Good morning and welcome. It's my privilege to be with you today. I'm glad you've chosen to spend a few moments studying and meditating upon the word of God. Today, we wish to talk about decisions. Since God created us as beings of will and volition, we are confronted with decisions every day we live. Most of these choices seem so small that we almost make them subconsciously. Some of those choices are pivotal and life-altering. As we grow to adulthood, we are confronted with several decisions that will most likely set the trajectory of our life going forward. Not that we can't make other decisions later (when we are older and wiser) that will put us on a better course, but how much better off we are if we have someone to share their wisdom and point us in the right direction and we make those decisions early in life.

There are many passages in the bible challenging us to make the right decisions, but perhaps one of the most familiar is found in Deuteronomy 30:19 where Moses told the people of Israel: ***"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."***

Moses sets a choice before the people. There were two options: life or death; blessing or cursing. All of life's choices today come down to this same ultimatum. Of all the major decisions we will make in life, I believe the word of God highlights three that are the most consequential of all. In fact, if we make the right decisions in these three areas, that will take care of the other decisions that will follow. Stay with me for today's study: Life's Greatest Decisions, after a song from the congregation.

We literally spend all our conscious lives making decisions. From the moment we wake up to the moment we fall asleep we are constantly making choices. God made us beings of volition or free will. According to an article in Psychology Today, on average, we make more than 35,000 decisions in the course of a single day. If we sleep for seven hours, that amounts to about 2,000 decisions every hour and 2 choices per second. Obviously, most of those decisions within themselves are not going to alter

the course of our lives. They may have a cumulative effect as one decision often leads to another, but most of the choices we make in a day don't have an observable impact on the trajectory of our lives. Others, however, do.

Moses made a single choice at 40 years old that completely changed the direction of his life when he chose to identify with his people, the people of God, and renounce the royal trappings of Egypt. Alongside a dusty road near the border of Moab, a young pagan woman named Ruth decided to leave her family and home to follow Naomi back to Israel. That one decision led to a series of events that not only secured a future for her but for us as well by leading to Jesus Christ being born of the kingly family of David. And we could go on and tell of many other great choices that changed history.

There is great power in a choice. As I say, God created us to be able to choose right from wrong and we should realize the weight of responsibility that that human characteristic places upon our shoulders. First, we are free to choose. Second, are not free to choose the consequences of our choice. Once we have made our choice, we cannot control the consequences. We reap what we sow. Third, we are not free to NOT choose. In other words, each one of us makes choices that will affect our lifelong and eternal destiny. You cannot say "well, I will remain neutral and simply not choose." That is impossible because in trying NOT to choose, you are of necessity making a choice right then. Jesus said that he who is not for Him is against Him. So, when you refuse to say "yes" to Christ, you have already said "no" to Him. And then number four, when you make the big choices in life, that often takes care of the smaller choices. When you settle the biggest issues, that leaves no need for deliberation about the smaller issues. I chose a long time ago to never smoke or drink so, I never have to decide what brand or kind of alcohol to buy because that decision was taken out of the way when I chose to abstain all together. I resolved a long time ago, when I became a Christian, to worship God every Lord's Day. I, therefore, don't have to make a choice every time Sunday comes around. Unless it is a circumstance beyond my control, such as serious sickness or injury, I know how my Sunday morning will be spent. That's the effect long-range decisions have on the smaller ones.

Well, I want to talk about three major decisions that are just that way. They are three of the greatest decisions you and I are ever confronted with and will have more to do with how you live your life in sum and where you will spend eternity than any other. They are the decisions pertaining to your master, your mate, and your mission in life.

First, we must all choose who our master will be, who we will serve. Who is your master? You may say, "Well, me. I am free to do as I please and no one tells me what to do or how to live my life." But is that true? We live in a world divided into various kingdoms, which at the least want to maintain their power if not expand it. The kingdoms around us seek to have as much dominance, control, and influence as they can. But that's not only true geo-politically; it is true spiritually. Spiritually, there are two kingdoms wrestling for control of every person and you are a citizen and a subject of one of those two powers. There is the kingdom of God and the kingdom of devil; the kingdom of righteousness and the kingdom of sin; the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness; the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of this world system. Now, whichever kingdom we're part of tells us who our allegiance and obeisance belong to. Paul said to the Christians in Colossae in Colossians 1:13, "He has delivered us from the power (that word means rule or dominion) of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love," In other words, you belong to and are under the rule of the devil or the rule of Christ Jesus. There is no other kingdom to which you might belong.

Now, you may say, “No, I’m my own master. I do as I choose. Nobody tells me how to live.” But that’s a delusion. Paul wrote in Romans 6:16, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” Well, how do present ourselves as slaves to evil? Look back in verses 12 and 13: “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

When you live to fulfill the desires of the flesh or you live for your own pleasure or for your own profit or perhaps to fit in and please the world, you are presenting your mind, body, and soul to the devil to use for His purposes. You are his pawn that he uses to build up his kingdom which seeks to thwart the authority of God over His creation. That’s why the bible pictures a constant battle taking place, not only in the unseen realms but in our hearts as well. That internal battle is between the flesh and the spirit; to allow the flesh with its carnal appetites to control or to have the flesh under the control of our spirit which, in turn, is to be subject to the Spirit of God through His word. Either the spirit is in control, or the flesh is in control and if the spirit is in control, that’s because God rules on the throne of your heart, and if the flesh is in control, then Satan rules there. It’s as simple as that. That’s why Paul described some in 2 Timothy 3:4 as “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,” If we unrepentantly live in sin and do what we want instead of submitting ourselves to the law of God, the devil is in control of us. We are his slave. Jesus thus said in John 8:34, “Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”

So, it’s not a matter of living as we please, as so many think, it’s a matter of being under the dominion of Satan and sin or the dominion of Christ. Who is your Master? Whom do you serve? That’s a question you and I should stop to seriously consider. Paul said in Romans 8:5-6, “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” Living for the devil ensures present spiritual death and ultimately eternal death. Have you submitted your life to the will of God? Not if you’re stubbornly living in sin. Not if you’re refusing the gospel and obedience to the gospel. And as long as you live according to the flesh, you cannot please God. You cannot serve God. That’s what makes the decision “whom will you serve” such a fundamental choice. Submit yourself to Christ and find not only justification from past sins but let His sanctifying power then transform your life into something wonderful and give you everlasting life and peace. Refuse to surrender to Him and face the judgment and destruction that is coming to all of Satan’s domain.

Second, one of the greatest decisions you’ll ever make is not only your master, but your MATE. Few earthly choices will have a greater impact on the sum of your earthly life and your eternal fate than who you choose to marry. Marriage is a divine institution. It was not created by the government and therefore the government doesn’t have the right to define and regulate it. It is the creation of God and was the first institution He established in this world. It began in Eden when God said it was not good for the man whom He had created to be alone and so, He created a woman and placed her by Adam’s side that they might work together to fulfill God’s purpose for them on earth.

God created marriage as a means of populating the earth; giving man and woman physical fulfillment and pleasure; giving man and woman companionship and help for one another; but in and even above all of that, God created marriage to fulfill HIS purposes in the world and bring glory to Him. Therefore, marriage is a sacred and solemn estate. It even pictures the relationship of Christ and His bride, the church. (Ephesians 5:31-32) But many don’t look at marriage this way and consequently, they are

careless about entering into marriage and apply the wrong standards when choosing a mate. When that happens, not only do we denigrate the institution of marriage, but we bring great harm to ourselves and others.

Few things can destroy your life any more than marrying the wrong person. And few things will have as great an effect upon your spiritual life and your soul's destiny than the choice of who you marry. I believe it's wrong for a Christian to choose to marry someone outside of the faith. I didn't say it's wrong to BE married to someone outside of our faith because Paul talked about and regulated that situation in 1 Corinthians 7. But rather I said it is wrong for a Christian to choose to marry someone that is not headed the same direction spiritually as they are. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 7:39. Paul said a widow may marry whomever she wishes except that it be "only in the Lord." That's a command.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:14 that we are to not enter into a relationship where we are unequally yoked with an unbeliever because what communion is there between light and darkness, and so forth. Of all relationships, why would that not be true of the one where we are to be closer to the other person than anyone else on earth? I could give you example after example of people who made shipwrecks of their faith because of who they married and how the influence of the unbeliever or the weak and worldly Christian eventually won out. More importantly, the bible is full of such examples. God strictly forbade His people under the Old Testament from marrying the Canaanites and other pagan peoples. But yet, the disobedience and foolishness of His own people proved the wisdom of God's command time and again. King Solomon took hundreds of worldly wives who ended up turning his heart away from God. The wicked pagan woman Jezebel took a weak and already bad-off man named Ahab and sealed his fate and brought generations of death and judgment into their family.

You may say, I've already made the mistake. I married someone who doesn't live for the Lord. What do I do? You do what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7 and remain loyal to God and pray that your good influence wins them to Christ. But beware and DO NOT allow them to erode your faith and compromise your convictions. My point today is aimed primarily though at those who are unmarried: marry someone who is headed the same direction you are spiritually. Marry someone who will help you be more like Christ and cause you to love Him and His church more, not the other way around. Aside from deciding to follow Christ, who you marry is truly one of the most impactful decisions you will ever make in life.

Third, not only your master and your mate, one of life's three greatest decisions is your MISSION. What is your life about? What are you living for? In what are you investing yourself and the precious time and opportunity that God has afforded you in this existence called earthly life? For many, their mission is to acquire things: money, property, possessions. You play the "game of Life" and whoever ends up with the most wins. That's the predominate philosophy of life for most people. Consequently, they spend their lives obsessing and striving to "succeed" in life. Do you know what Paul said about that? ""But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.""

And then some make it their mission to find as much pleasure as they can. They live for fun and thrills. But Moses rightly decided when he was 40 years old and had tasted the pleasures of living in the palace of Egypt, that the pleasures of sin are only for a season. Some live to make a name for themselves. But -- we live a few years, we die, are buried, and most all of us are soon forgotten. Solomon spent much of his life discovering all of this. He begins his "sermon" to the young man in Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 saying, "The

words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Vanity refers to a breath or a vapor that is quick and fleeting and empty. That's the life that has as its mission the same things that Solomon tried to find happiness and fulfillment in. He tried money (of which he had plenty), he tried sex (he had hundreds of wives and concubines), he tried it all! And when the transitory pleasures of life had passed, he had to shake his head and say "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." So, he reminds us of two things. Everything we do in life will culminate in eternal judgment. Life is not merely about here and not, it's about the hereafter. He writes in Ecclesiastes 11:9 "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment." He then advises the young man in chapter 12 to instead, remember God while he is young and put his life to good use. Don't wait until you are old, and your life has been poured out like water and wasted to realize this. He then says in verses 13-14, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil."

Jesus said our life does not consist in the abundance of the things we possess. Our soul IS our great possession and if our mission in life is not to use our soul, our being, our life for the use and glory of God, then we have missed the mark, and our life is a waste. I want to challenge you today, to stop and contemplate your life and these three great decisions, because you'll never make any more important.

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