

Life and Death Choices

by Chuck Smith

This sermon focuses on the pivotal decision individuals must make regarding Jesus Christ, drawing parallels to the choices presented in the Bible such as Adam and Eve's decision in the Garden of Eden and the Israelites' choice between life and death. It emphasizes the importance of personally deciding what to do with Jesus, as it ultimately determines one's eternal destiny.

Scripture: Matthew 27:22, Deuteronomy 30:19, Joshua 24:15, Matthew 27:24, John 3:36, Matthew 27:22, Matthew 27:24, Matthew 27:25, Luke 23:34, John 1:12, John 3:18

Topics: "Personal Decision", "Eternal Destiny"

Description

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Transcript

Well, this week we finish the Gospel according to Matthew, and we will be moving on into the Gospel according to Mark next week. The final two chapters, chapters 27 and 28 tonight of the Book of Matthew, then moving into the Gospel according to Mark, we invite you to come. Join with us as we journey through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation here on Sunday evening.

This morning, I'd like to draw your attention to the 27th chapter of Matthew, verse 22, where we read, Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do with Jesus, who is called the Messiah? And they all said unto him, Let him be crucified. It is interesting that from the beginning God, it seems, has given to man the choice of life and death. Back in the Garden of Eden, there were two basic main trees.

The one was called the tree of life. The other was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And God warned Adam and Eve that in the day that they would eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die.

So you might say the two trees in the Garden were, one, the tree of life, and the second, the tree of death. When God spoke to Israel as He brought them out of Egypt, He said, See, I have set before you this day life and death, in that I command you to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and the Lord your

God will bless you in the land that you go in to possess. But if your hearts turn away, so that you will not hear, and you are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare unto you this day that you will surely perish, and that you shall not prolong your days in the land.

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, that you and your children may live. Later in their history, as they had come into the land and had conquered the land, Joshua, just before his dying, gathered the people together to address them for the last time.

Joshua said, God has given you a land for which you did not labor, cities which you did not build, that you might enjoy the fruit of the vineyards and the olive orchards which you did not plant. Now therefore fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and in truth. Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt, and serve Jehovah.

And if it seems evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah. Here on Father's Day I think that that's a very powerful passage of Scripture.

I think it's a wonderful thing when a father can stand and he can speak declaring, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. I think it's important that the father take that lead role and can speak for the family declaring we, the family, will serve the Lord. In our text, the people are again making a decision of life or death.

Jesus has been brought before the Roman governor Pilate, and Pilate is in a very difficult position because the people that brought Jesus to him are demanding that Pilate sentence him to death. But Pilate knows that the charges against him are just trumped up charges. He knows that it was for envy that they delivered Jesus to him.

He also has the urging of his wife, who sent the message to him and said, Have nothing to do with this just man. I've suffered many things in a dream because of him. Not only that, Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent.

He called Jesus a just man. On the other hand, he realized that he could not prevail against the mob, the mob that was calling for the crucifixion of Jesus and that a real tumult was being made. He endeavored to offer compromises.

At the Passover, the Roman governor usually released a political prisoner free to the people as a gesture of Romans' recognition of their holiday. But there was a notable prisoner, an extremely wicked man, a public enemy number one. His name was Barabbas.

So Pilate struck upon the idea of offering the release of Barabbas or Jesus at this time, figuring that there is no way that the populace would want Barabbas released again into their society. He was a vicious murderer. And so he said to the people, Which of the two do you desire that I release unto you, Jesus or Barabbas? And he was shocked as the priest had instructed the people to call for the release of Barabbas.

They called for the blood of the innocent man to be upon them and their children. And so when they said, Barabbas, release unto us Barabbas, Pilate said unto them, What then shall I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah? The question is one that every normal, rational person who has ever been born must answer for themselves. It was not something that just this Roman judge faced.

It was a decision that everyone must make individually. What will I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah? He tried to wash his hands. He said, Bring me a basin of water.

And he began to wash his hands before the mob. And he said, I'm innocent of the blood of this just man. I want you to see to that.

And they all cried out, His blood be upon us and upon our children. But what will you do with Jesus who is called Christ? Everyone makes their decision one way or another. But it's important to realize that not to accept him is to reject him.

Not to believe that he is the Son of God is to believe that he was a liar, a deceiver, or if you are more kindly disposed, he was deluded. You cannot be neutral. Jesus said, He that is not for me is against me.

It again comes down to the choice of life and death. The Bible said, He that believes on the Son has life. He that believes not the Son of God shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

So it is a matter of choice, a choice that you make, whether to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and to receive the forgiveness of your sins and the promise of eternal life or the choice of not believing, rejecting Jesus as your Lord and Savior and facing the consequences that will surely befall those who do not believe. Choice. If you choose not to believe in Jesus, you can seek to formulate all of the excuses why you have chosen not to believe.

But because of the powerful evidence that he presented through his life and the miracles that he wrought and through the prophecies that he fulfilled, if you choose to believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah, then you have all of the proof and evidence that you might ever need to substantiate your belief in him, that you've made the right choice. Each one makes the choice for themselves. But there's an interesting twist to the whole thing.

Pilate was the judge. He was called upon to make a decision. The decision that he made really did not affect Jesus at all.

You say, oh, but he let him be crucified. Jesus was going to be crucified. It was prophesied in the Scriptures.

Jesus himself over and over had been predicting that he would be turned over to the Gentiles and they would crucify him. So what Jesus was to face, he was going to face. So in reality, the judgment did not affect Jesus or the destiny of Jesus.

But his decision did indeed affect his own destiny. Jesus had to die for the sins of the world. The prophecies of his death were very clear.

But in the decision, a person really doesn't determine what Jesus is. You say, well, I don't believe that he is the Son of God. That doesn't alter the fact that he is the Son of God.

It doesn't change him at all. I don't believe that Jesus is coming to establish God's kingdom. That doesn't stop his coming to establish God's kingdom.

You see, your decision doesn't affect Jesus at all. He is what he is. He's going to do what he said he's going to do.

And whether or not you believe it doesn't alter that fact. However, your decision does indeed affect your own destiny. The Bible tells us that one day he will be the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

The Bible tells us that one day every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That's you. That's me.

Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That will happen.

Whether you believe it or not, it's going to happen. So you see, your choice doesn't affect the future, what Jesus is, what Jesus is going to do. But it surely does affect your future.

I always have trouble with that story of Adam and Eve. When they had a tree of life, to eat of it live forever. And the tree of death, to eat of it to ensure death.

Why in all good judgment would they eat of the tree of death rather than the tree of life? I just cannot comprehend or understand why they would do that. Here's the choice. You can choose life or death.

With the children of Israel, God said, I've set before you the choice. Choose life that you might live. But why is it when people, given the choice of life or death, why is it that so many foolishly choose death instead of life? It seems to me that the decision would be a no-brainer.

Someone say, well I choose, you know, I give you the choice, life or death. I'll choose life. It's a no-brainer.

Yet, though I have problem with Adam and Eve, I guess I really shouldn't. Because I see people today, again, the choice of life and death. He that hath the Son hath life.

He that believeth on the Son hath life. And he that believeth not the Son shall not see life. And so here is that choice given to each of us today.

I must decide what I will do with Jesus, who is called the Messiah, and how I decide will determine my own destiny. Pilate tried to reason with them. When they said concerning Jesus, crucify Him, he said, why? What evil has he done? He tried to rationalize, but they were irrational.

When he asked what evil has he done, they couldn't name anything. So all they did was cry out more, let Him be crucified. No reason, no rationale, let Him be crucified.

Today, if you ask a person, why don't you believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God? They can't really give you a rational reason for why they do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Pilate, because he did not want to take the responsibility of the death of Jesus, washes his hands before them as they cry, His blood be upon us and on our children. In less than 40 years, I am certain that many of them who lived for 40 more years rude that statement, His blood be upon us and our children.

The historian Josephus tells us that when Jerusalem was besieged by Rome, Titus, the Roman general, that the conditions became so bad in the city of Jerusalem that the children were pulling the very morsels of food that their fathers were eating out of their mouths. And what was still more, he said, to be pitied, so did the mothers to their infants. And when those that were most dear were perishing under their hands, they were not ashamed to take from them the very last drops that might preserve their lives.

And while they ate after this manner, yet were they not concealed in so doing, because there were roving gangs that were everywhere through the city. And they would come upon them immediately and snatch

away from them that which they had gotten from others. For when the gangs saw any house, the doors were closed.

This was a sign to them that the people within had gotten some food, whereupon they broke open the doors, ran in, and took the pieces of what they were eating almost out of their very throats. And this by force. The old men who held their food fast were beaten, and the women that hid what they had, they had their hair torn out in so doing.

And so was there no pity shown either to the aged or the infants, but they lifted up the children from the ground as they hung upon the morsels that they had gotten, and they shook them down upon the floor. So all hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews, and the famine increased until it devoured whole houses and families. The lanes of the city were full of dead bodies of the aged.

The children wandered about like shadows, swollen with famine, and would fall down dead. And those who sought to bury the dead often died while attempting to do so. Because they could not bury all of the dead, they began to just throw the bodies over the wall into the valleys beneath.

And when Titus the Roman general was making his rounds through those valleys, and he saw the multitude of dead, rotting bodies, he groaned and, spreading out his hands to heaven, called God to witness that this was not of his doing. I wonder if any of those, while they were suffering such miseries, remembered back to that day when they cried to Pilate, His blood be upon us and on our children. The tragedy today is that there are many people who are making a decision concerning Jesus Christ without ever examining the evidence.

When a decision is so important that it does determine your eternal destiny, you would think that any rational person would study the matter intensely to make sure that he was making the right decision. If you have really studied the life of Christ, if you've really read the Gospels, and then you say, well, I don't believe it, I will at least respect the fact that you sought to find the answers. But if you've not really examined the evidence at all, and yet you say, well, I don't believe, I can't respect you as an intelligent person.

Those who chose to reject Jesus Christ as their Savior, they have chosen a fate that is worse than death. Pilate said, what shall I then do with Jesus who is called the Messiah? What can you do? Well, you can confess him as your Lord. Jesus said, if you confess me before men, I will confess you before my Father.

You can deny him. Jesus said, if you deny me before men, I will deny you before my Father in the presence of the holy angels. You can receive him as your Lord and Savior, and if you do, you have the promise of eternal life.

Or you can reject him as your Lord and Savior, and you will discover that God has made no other provisions for the forgiving of your sins. You can receive him as your Lord, and as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God. You can believe.

To believe is to have eternal life, the hope of eternal life in him. Or you can choose not to believe, and leave you in a hopeless condition concerning the future. What will I do with this man Jesus who is called the Messiah? That's the question you must ask yourself, a question of life and death.

Father, today, as we are here and as we have faced the word of God, and we see the dilemma that this Roman judge was put in, going against his own conscience, going against what he knew was right and

just, but feeling the pressure of the crowd to go along with the crowd. And we see the fearful consequences of that choice. We realize, Lord, they are here today that are in the same kind of dilemma as in their hearts.

They know that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. And yet the pressure of friends and of others, keeping them from making that choice, choosing death over life. Father, help them this day to realize that this is the most important choice in their entire life.

That their decision affects their eternal fate. And so may they make a wise decision. Give them wisdom.

Give them understanding to make the right choice. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front. And today, if you would like to make that choice of believing in Jesus Christ, accepting him as your Lord and Savior, receiving him into your life, I would encourage you, as we are dismissed, make your way forward. Come down and talk to one of these pastors and tell them, today I choose to receive Jesus Christ as my Lord and Master.

They'll be happy to pray with you. Answer what questions you might have. And you can go from this service today with the assurance, the blessed assurance, of eternal life through him.

The Lord bless thee. And keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee.

And be gracious unto thee. And be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee.

And give thee peace. God bless you.

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