

The Choice

by Chuck Smith

God sets before us the choice of life or death, with the choice of life leading to blessings and prosperity, and the choice of death leading to curses and destruction.

Duration: 41:25

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:19, Psalm 16:11, Proverbs 12:28, Ecclesiastes 7:17, Matthew 16:24, John 5:24, Romans 6:23

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Following Jesus"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of making the right choice between the path of life and the path of death, drawing parallels from biblical stories like Adam and Eve's choice in the Garden of Eden, King Zedekiah's decision to rebel against Babylon, and the consequences of wrong choices. It highlights the need to deny self, take up the cross, and follow Jesus for eternal life and joy in God's kingdom.

Transcript

Now shall we turn in our Bibles to Psalm 16 for our scripture reading this morning. I'll read the first, the outnumbered verses. We invite you to join together as you read the even-numbered verses, and shall we stand as we read the Word of God.

This Psalm is a prayer of David. David prays, Preserve me, O God, for in Thee do I put my trust. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, I honor my Lord, my goodness is great unto me.

But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent in whom is all my delight. Their sorrows shall not multiply, their haste shall not be cut up, their great offerings of blood I will not offer, but will take up their names as martyrs. The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup.

Thou maintainest my lot. The lights have fallen unto me in the pleasant places, the air that I have begun to hear. I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel.

My reigns also instruct me in the night seasons. The Lord is always before me, because he is after my hand. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth.

My flesh also shall rest in hope. Thou wilt show to me the path of life, and in Thy presence is fullness of joy, and at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that you have indeed shown to us the path of life. May we choose to walk in that path, that path, Lord, that leads us into your kingdom, into your presence, where there is fullness of joy. There at your right hand, where there are pleasures forevermore.

Help us, Lord, as we stand at the crossroads and as we look at the paths that are before us, and as the choice is given to us as to which path we will walk. Help us, Lord, to make the wise choice, the path that will lead into that eternal kingdom of God. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. You may be seated. The next three chapters of Jeremiah are rather short, and so we'll try to cover all three chapters tonight, 19 through 21.

So we encourage you, read them over this afternoon, and then come out tonight as Pastor Skip will continue his study through the Bible. And these are excellent opportunities to understand the teaching of the Bible, and Pastor Skip is a very gifted teacher, one that you will, I'm sure, surely enjoy. In chapter 21, verse 8, The Lord is instructing Jeremiah to say to King Zedekiah, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.

Several years ago, while we were living in Huntington Beach, a lady was driving Kay home late one evening, and Kay came in and said, Chuck, we just came past the mortuary. A man is lying there on the steps. We think he might be dead.

Come with us and take a look. So I got in the car with them, and they drove around the corner to the mortuary, and I got out to examine the body. And as I looked for any sign of life, perhaps the chest moving as he was breathing, or perhaps a pulse, there was none, and they called out and they said, Is he alive? Now that question, is he alive? It is what we usually consider to be alive.

That is, are the organs of his body still functioning? Is his heart still beating? Are his lungs still taking in air? But of course, as I reached to check his pulse, I saw the gun, I saw the hole in his head, and I had to answer back, No, he's dead. We went around the corner to inform the police, and I also went over to let the owner of the mortuary know that there was a man that was lying on the steps of the mortuary who was dead. But it's interesting how that we so often think of life only in the terms of physical existence.

He is alive, he's breathing, he's talking, he's moving around, he's alive, but it's also interesting that the Scripture has also an entirely different definition of being alive. As far as the Scripture is concerned, real life is not physical life, but real life is spiritual life. And you can have real physical life but be spiritually dead.

Paul the Apostle said that if a person is living only for pleasure, then they are dead while they are still alive. I heard about two grave diggers who were ordered to dig an especially large hole in the ground that covered several of the normal grave sites. They were wondering why they were ordered to dig such a large hole, and they discovered that a very wealthy lady had died.

She had a pink Cadillac that she just thoroughly enjoyed, and thus her request was that instead of a casket, she'd be buried sitting at the driver's seat of her pink Cadillac. And so they had propped her up and she was there at the driver's seat, and as they watched the crane slowly let the Cadillac down into the big hole that they had dug, one of the grave diggers turned to the other and he said, now that's real living. Well, no, it's not.

But our concept of life, real living, is often very wrong, because unless you have spiritual life, you're not really living. The Bible says, he that has the Son of God has life. He that has not the Son of God doesn't have life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

Back in Florida right now, there is an interesting legal case that is being carried through the courts and through the appeals. There is a lady who is in a comatose state, and she is being kept alive by artificial means. It's been now several months into the years.

Her husband wants to remove the life support system, but her family is insisting that they keep the life support system connected, and they've gone to court in order to force them to leave the life support system on for their daughter. And it has become quite a court battle, as the husband is fighting to have the life support system shut off, and they are insisting that they keep it on. Now, the question is, is she really alive? Being in a comatose condition, depending completely upon the machines to keep the heart pumping and the processes going on, is she really alive? And that is the issues that the courts are fighting with right now.

Now, according to some, no. She's not alive. She's not able to function on her own.

She can't breathe on her own. She can't eat on her own. She's being fed with tubes and so forth.

No, she's not really alive. She's in a comatose condition, and she's not really alive. But yet, the body functions are still going.

So many people are like this woman. They're not really alive as far as the Bible is concerned, because as far as God is concerned, they're in a comatose situation. They are totally unconscious of God.

God has no place in their minds, in their lives. They're living as though God did not exist, and from a biblical sense, they are dead. It's possible for a person to go through their entire life without ever really living.

Jesus said that if you live and believe in me, you will never die. Now, he is speaking about spiritual death. He's speaking about the separation of your consciousness from God.

If you live and believe in me, you will never die. Now, Zedekiah had called Jeremiah. Because he had rebelled against the king of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar had placed Zedekiah as king over Judah when he displaced Jehoiachin. And the people, the leaders, the advisors, advised Zedekiah to rebel against Babylon. Though Babylon had conquered Jerusalem, taken captives, they said they'll never come back with their army.

They'll never traverse over that desert again. Go ahead and rebel against Nebuchadnezzar and against Babylon. And so Zedekiah did rebel against Babylon.

But word has come that the Babylonian army is again on its way to Jerusalem. And Zedekiah is troubled by the fact that the Babylonian army is on its way. So he called Jeremiah to find out from the Lord what they should do to get God's counsel and advice.

And so Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, You should surrender to Babylon. Don't resist them. If you surrender, you will live.

And Jerusalem will be spared. If you fight against them, they will take and destroy Jerusalem. They will destroy your family.

And you will be taken as a captive to Babylon. So he has now God's counsel. And as the Lord said, Behold, I have set before you the way of life and the way of death.

It's now up to Zedekiah to choose which path he will take. The path of surrender that will give him life or the path of rebellion that will bring him death. Throughout the Bible, we see that this is true, that God sets before man the choice of life or of death.

Back in the Garden of Eden, when God placed Adam and Eve there, there was a tree in the Garden. And God said, You have the freedom to eat of all of the trees that are in the Garden, except the one there in the middle of the Garden. And in the day that you eat of that tree, you will surely die.

So that tree in the middle of the Garden could very well be called the tree of death. And Adam and Eve had the choice of eating of that tree if they so desired. There was also another tree there in the Garden.

It was called the tree of life. And after they ate of the tree of death, God put an angel there at the gate of the Garden to keep them from reentering, for they were banished from the Garden, lest they would eat of the tree of life and live forever in that sinful state. But the choice was theirs of eating of either of those trees.

It's remarkable to me that they ate of the tree of death. When God called Israel to become a nation, through Moses, God gave to them the law, the rules by which they were to live. And to follow these rules, they would become a strong nation.

They would be a nation that would be blessed by God. They would be blessed in every possible way that you could imagine if you will keep these rules. You will flourish, you will prosper, you'll have need of nothing.

But, if you break these rules, then you will be driven from this land that the Lord has given to you. You will be conquered by your enemies. You will have all kinds of problems.

There will be pestilences that will fill the land. There will be droughts that will curse the land. All of these things will happen if you fail to obey the rules.

And as God said there in Deuteronomy, I have set before you life and death, good and evil. And I call heaven and earth to record against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and cursings. Therefore, God said, choose life that both you and your children may live.

The choice I've set before you. There are two paths. The path of life and blessings or the path of death and curses.

Your choice. In Proverbs, he does speak about life and death. He said, the path of righteousness is life.

And in that pathway, there is no death. Again, he said, righteousness tends to life. But he that pursues evil is pursuing the snares of death.

Again, the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. And he who departs from it is in the snare of death. In John chapter 5, Jesus said, He that hears my word and believes on him who sent me has everlasting life and

shall not come into condemnation, but he has passed from death to life.

Interesting. When Adam and Eve ate of that tree that brought death, they were banished from the garden and not allowed to return and eat of the tree of life. In other words, it was a one-way road out to death.

But now God is making another road for those who are on the path of death to turn and to come into the path of life. Jesus said that he who believes or hears my word and believes on him who has sent me has everlasting life, will not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life. So the possibility of coming back into the kingdom of God and into fellowship with God made possible through Jesus Christ.

Now, the kingdom of Satan could very well be called the kingdom of death and darkness for that's exactly what it is. The kingdom of Jesus Christ could be called the kingdom of light and life because that is exactly what it is. And we have the choice as to which kingdom we will live in.

I can choose to live in the kingdom of Jesus Christ by surrendering my life to him. Or I can choose to live in the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of death and darkness by listening to his lies and following his guidance and advice. Each of us are living in one or other of these two kingdoms.

You're either living in the kingdom of light and life or you are living in the kingdom of death and darkness. When Jesus commissioned Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles, he said, I want you to open their eyes to turn them from the darkness to the light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive the forgiveness of their sins and an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in me. As Paul tells us in Romans 6.23, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Also in chapter 8 he said, the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the spirit is life and joy and peace. Now it is important that we note that God in each case gave the choice to the people, to Adam and Eve the choice of which tree they would eat. The tree that would bring death was accessible to them and it was their choice to eat of that tree.

In Deuteronomy, God gave the choice to the people to obey and to follow his law or they had that freedom to rebel against the law of God which indeed they did and they suffered those consequences that God declared would happen if they so chose to rebel against his word. In all of the cases, choosing obedience to the commandments of God would lead them into life. Choosing to rebel against the commandment of God would be the way of death.

Now to me, the great mystery and enigma is how many people in having that choice made the choice of death. Adam and Eve, they're in the garden. Many trees, but two of note.

One, the tree of death. The other, the tree of life. Their choice.

How strange it is to me that they would choose to eat of the tree of death rather than to eat of the tree of life. Perhaps it was because the tree of death was very attractive. Perhaps the fruit looked very luscious.

Had a pleasant aroma. And we do know that it was very tasty. It probably looked tasty.

It was pleasant to the eyes. It was pleasant to the taste. Sensual.

And they ate of it. It was desirable, fleshly desirable. Perhaps the tree of life looked like health food.

Not very attractive. Not very tasty. But healthy.

Would make you, you know, live forever. But for some strange reason, they made the wrong choice. And as a result, by one man, the Bible said, that sin entered the world and death by sin so that death passed unto all men for all sin.

Today, we are all of us suffering as a result of the choice that Adam made. Our bodies are growing older. And we are, all of us, in the process of dying.

Sooner or later, physical death. Because of the choice that Adam made so long ago. Wrong choices not only affect us, but they can affect and do affect others.

With the children of Israel, they chose to follow other gods. They chose to disobey the commandments of God. And as a result, they were ultimately driven from the land.

And to the present day, they are still suffering because of the choice that their fathers made to disregard the law of God. And they have become, as God said, a curse and a byword throughout the world. And the anti-Semitism that is in the world today is the result of the choices that their fathers made.

The choice of death rather than life. Not obeying the commandments of God rather than following God and loving God with all their heart, soul, and mind. With King Zedekiah, as God said, I give you the choice of life or death.

He chose death. His counselor said, they'll never be able to take our city. We have fortified the walls and they'll never be able to conquer us.

Don't submit to Babylon. Let's fight against them. And despite what Jeremiah the prophet had told him, he decided that they would fight against the invasion by the Babylonians.

But even as Jeremiah did tell him, it was the path of death. For the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians and thousands and thousands of people died because of Zedekiah's choice of death. Horrible deaths.

Starving to death under the siege. When the breach was finally made within the city and the Babylonian troops came in, they took the little children and dashed their brains out on the pavement. There is a psalm that sort of seeks God's vengeance against Babylon in which he says, let their children be dashed even as they dashed our children on the pavements.

The choice. Bad choice. The choice of death.

But it affected so many others. Finally, when the Babylonians entered the city, Zedekiah took a secret passage to escape out of the city. He took his wives and his children.

Some of the generals and officers of the army went with him. And they fled from Jerusalem and they were heading down to Jericho trying to escape the Babylonians. But someone had told the Babylonians that they were escaping towards Jericho.

And so they pursued after them. And Josephus, the historian, writes this. When the Babylonians had encircled him and his friends and the captains of Zedekiah's host who had fled out of the city with him, when they saw the enemy near them, they left Zedekiah and dispersed themselves, some going one way

and others another, as all of them were resolved to save his own life.

So the enemy took Zedekiah alive with his children and his wives, and they brought him to King Nebuchadnezzar who began to call him a wicked wretch, a covenant breaker, one that had forgotten his promise to keep the country for Nebuchadnezzar. He also reproached him for his ingratitude, for when he had received the kingdom from Nebuchadnezzar, he had made use of the power that was given to him by Nebuchadnezzar against the one who had given it to him. Nebuchadnezzar said, But God is great, who hated his conduct and have brought you under us.

And when he had thus spoken these words to Zedekiah, he commanded that Zedekiah's sons and his friends to be slain as Zedekiah was forced to watch it. After which he put out his eyes and bound him and carried him to Babylon. And these things happened to Zedekiah just like Jeremiah and Ezekiel had prophesied that he would be caught, brought before the king of Babylon, would speak to him face to face and would see him eye to eye.

But as Jeremiah said, but as Ezekiel said, he was also to be made blind and brought to Babylon though he would never see Babylon. He could have spared himself and spared Jerusalem from all of the bloodshed and death. But he made the wrong choice.

God said, I've set before you life and death. Whenever you choose to disobey God, you can be sure that you are making the wrong choice that will bring ultimate disaster to your life. The Bible tells us that the way of the transgressor is hard.

So many people though, like Adam and Eve, like Zedekiah, make the wrong choices. Because you see, Satan appeals to our flesh, our desire for pleasure, comfort, ease, which he promises to give to them who will follow him. He also promises immediate fulfillment, immediate gratification, immediate satisfaction.

Jesus tells us that we, if we're going to come after him, have to deny ourselves the self-light. We've got to take up our cross and follow him. And when Satan is saying, look, here's the path of pleasure, here's the path of excitement, you can have immediate fulfillment now.

And Jesus said, you've got to deny self, you've got to take up your cross and follow me. People in looking at that say, well, my, I would rather have the immediate gratification and pleasures now. Why should I deny myself? Why should I take up the cross? Why should I follow him? Well, Jesus said that if we would deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him, that it would lead to eternal life.

It would lead into the presence of God, where there is fullness of joy. It would bring us to his right hand where there are pleasures forevermore. Satan offers pleasure for a time.

We read concerning Moses that he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of Egypt for a short time. He chose to take up the cross. He chose to follow the path of God, though it would lead through hardship, through the wilderness and all, it would lead to eternal glory.

And looking at the end of the path, he chose the right path to take, the path of life. You need to look at the path. Are you settling for temporary pleasures, thrills and all that the world offers? The path that Satan is offering is very glitzy, as represented by Hollywood and Vegas and all.

It's a glitzy path, but the end of it is tragedy, it's heartbreak, it's sorrow. It's interesting. Jesus came to redeem this world for God.

And when he came to redeem the world, he knew the price would be his death upon the cross. By his death on the cross, he paid the price to redeem the world that it would be God's once again. When Satan took Jesus to the high mountain and showed to him the kingdoms of the world, he said to him, All of these I will give to you and the glory of them.

For they are mine, I can give them to whomever I please. I will give them to you if you will bow down and worship me. He is saying to Jesus, You don't have to go the path of the cross.

You can have it now. Immediate fulfillment. The cross isn't necessary.

I'll give it to you now. Just take my path. And so Satan says to people today, The cross isn't necessary.

You can find fulfillment now. Bow down, worship me. Rebel against God.

And God says, No, I've given to you the path of life, the path of death. Choose life that you and your children may live. It's what's at the end of the path that really matters.

And the path of rebellion against God, the end of it is death. The path of obedience to Jesus Christ. The end of it is life, eternal life.

Life in the glories and the wonders of God's eternal kingdom. That's what is promised to those who will follow him. Too many people believe that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

And thus they buy into Satan's offer. But oh, what sad and tragic consequences. They discover it's the path of death.

Each of us today are walking along the path. Some are walking the path that leads to death. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes, There is a way that seems right on demand.

But the end of that path is death. Important that you today take a look at your life. Is your life being lived for the Lord? In submission to him, in obedience to him.

Are you seeking to live to please God? Or are you seeking to live to please yourself? The self life, the flesh life. That life is dead while you're still alive. You may be laughing and smiling and, you know, going through all of the motions, but God looks at you and says, they're dead.

Dead in trespasses and sins. But you can be alive by submitting to Jesus. Father, we thank you that you have given to us this capacity of choice.

And help us, Lord, to make a wise choice. May we not fall for the deceitfulness that Satan is seeking to deceive the minds of man into thinking that his path is the best. Lord, may we choose this day to believe in your promises and by faith to follow you leading us, Lord, to that path of life in your kingdom forever and ever.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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