

“This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.” Deuteronomy 30: 19—20

On a beautiful November day in 2014, in the skies over Perth, Australia, Christopher Jones jumped out of an airplane. It was his first solo skydive. Christopher had a history of epilepsy but had not suffered a seizure in over four years, had been cleared by a doctor to enter a skydiving program, and had successfully completed four tandem jumps with an instructor with no issues. So, on that November day, when the plane reached 12,000 feet, he jumped, followed immediately by his instructor, Sheldon McFarlane, a master parachutist with 10,000 jumps under his belt.

A jump from this height takes roughly two minutes from beginning to end. Every second counts, which makes what happened next incredibly scary. Christopher had an epileptic seizure at 8,000 feet. Unconscious, he flipped over on his back and started to spin, plummeting towards the earth at 120 miles per hour. McFarlane had to act very quickly. Ignoring the alarm telling him to deploy his main chute at 5,000 feet, McFarlane did a freefall to Christopher Jones to try to open his chute for him, but came in too fast and couldn't make the maneuver. With 4,500 feet to go, he had 14 seconds before reaching the 2,000 foot zone, at which point it doesn't make much difference if you can open your chute or not; 14 seconds to decide what to do and take action, at the speed of a sportscar rocketing towards the earth. McFarlane made one last decision.

What do you want: life or death? Do you want prosperity or destruction? Ridiculous questions, right? Who would choose death and destruction over life and prosperity?

And yet these are exactly the questions Moses asked God's people during their desert pilgrimage. He asked these questions because God asked him to. He asked them because, unfortunately, they needed to be asked. They provided a perspective that had somehow gone missing.

Is it life you want, or death? Would you prefer prosperity or destruction? If it's life and prosperity you want, Moses says, then love the Lord your God; walk in his ways; keep his commands, decrees and laws—then you will really live and be blessed.

If it's death and destruction you want, Moses says, then just let your heart turn away from God; disobey him; find a false god to worship. That is a sure recipe for disaster, but if that's what you're looking for, you're sure to find it.

When phrased that way these are ridiculous questions, aren't they? Who would choose death and destruction over life and prosperity? The right way to go is obvious, isn't it? Then why is it so hard for us to choose it? Why do we doubt that God is right?

The answer is that each one of us was born with a spiritual terminal illness, passed on to us from the generations before us. That disease is called sin. Because we are infected with sin, our hearts are naturally turned away from God. Our default setting is disobedience. We are

drawn to other gods, and we worship them freely. Even though there is a part of us that knows that God's way is the way of life, we still choose death and destruction, not that we typically jump right to death and destruction, but we start on the surface. We choose a way that leads to death when we choose monetary wealth as our god, or when we choose worldly success at all costs as our god, or when we choose leisure activities as our god, or when we choose a relationship with another human being as our god, or when we choose ourselves as our god. It's so easy to say, "Who would choose death?" And yet our actions; the actions and history of humanity betray us. They're a record of destructive choices. They're a record of trying to put all kind of things that are not God on the throne of our lives. Those things make terrible gods because they are not up to the task. They may even be good things, but when you make a good thing an ultimate thing, you're giving it a terrible power over you. "If I don't have my career, I don't have anything." "If I don't have romantic love, I don't have anything." It's the way to self-destruction, because what happens when you don't get the thing you've given god status? It turns out the questions Moses asked are not as ridiculous as they seemed.

But there is another way. It is the way that leads to life. Will you choose it? It begins with realizing that there may be counterfeit gods on the throne of your life. Will you remove them and turn to Jesus Christ? Will you turn to Christ—the only person who ever kept God's commands, laws and decrees perfectly? The only one who ever loved God in total faithfulness? Will you turn to Jesus, God's own Son, for the forgiveness that only he can give? Will you come to Christ, who purchased your full pardon by his bloody death on the cross? He is God's love in human flesh and blood—sent here to meet his Father's demands for you—to be your substitute in punishment—to share his resurrection with you---and to be your source of love for God. The Lord Jesus is eternal life—and He is yours. He (and all that He is) was given to you in the sacrament of Baptism. With the water and the name of God came a connection to Jesus that constantly benefits you. With water and the name of God came faith itself—the ability to receive the great gifts God gives, like hands reaching out to receive a birthday present. That same gift of faith enables you to actively pursue God's way of life.

Sheldon McFarlane had 14 seconds to decide and act to save Chris Jones. Under 4,500 feet, he dives, almost like Superman, grabs Jones' harness, pulls him sideways so as not to get tangled, and pulls Jones' rip cord. The chute deploys successfully. Then, at 4,000 feet, McFarlane opens his own chute and executes some turns to slow his descent. At 3,000 Chris Jones regains consciousness, and follows the instructions coming through the radio in his helmet to pull off a perfect landing. Life or death. Decision, action, life.

Look at everything God wants to give you. Life. Prosperity. Forgiveness. A new start. Purpose. Love. Everlasting life in heaven. He does not ask you to earn these things. He simply asks you to believe He did. Every second matters. What do you say? Death, or life?