

*“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

Some choices in life are agonizing. It’s almost impossible to decide which way to go. When you feel like you have to choose between the lesser of two evils, it can cause you significant stress, to say the least.

But every once in a while we are blessed with easy choices. No-brainers. Decisions like: “What flavor of ice cream will I get?” “What should I get my daughter for her birthday?” These choices are fun. It’s pleasure to make them. Many times, the answers are obvious.

Here’s a few more choices to consider. Would you like life or death? Do you prefer prosperity or destruction? Ridiculous questions, aren’t they? Who in their right mind would choose death and destruction over life and prosperity? That’s not really much of choice, is it?

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 need to be framed in this way to get our attention.

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 live and increase and you will be blessed.

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

When phrased that way these are ridiculous questions, aren’t they? Who in their right mind would choose death and destruction over life and prosperity? That’s not really much of a choice, is it? 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 Bible tells us. Each one of us was born with a terminal illness, passed on to us from the generations before us. That disease is called sinfulness. 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 when we choose monetary wealth as our god, or when we choose worldly success at all costs as our god, or when we choose sports and leisure 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 in their right mind would choose death?” And yet our actions betray us. They’re a record of destructive choices. It turns out the questions Moses asked are not ridiculous at all.

So, will you choose death, or life? Will you turn away from the gods of your own making 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? The Lord Jesus is your life. He is your way out of the bad choices you have made. He is the way to the land God wants to give you. He is God’s love in human flesh and bone—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.

Now here’s what you might call the great surprise. You can turn to Jesus because He turned to you first—or to use the language of Moses, God chose you first when Jesus was given to you in the sacrament of Baptism. With the water and the name of God came a connection to Jesus that has constant benefits for 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.

Here's a comparison that might be helpful. If we took a fish out of the water and laid it on the dry ground, we all know what would happen. It would flop around until it couldn’t flop any more. Why? Because it wasn’t made for life out of water. If you took that same fish and dropped it into a body of water, you’d get an instant reaction, the fish would move energetically and gracefully and probably quickly away. Why? Because it was made for life in the water. It gets its life from the water. The fish only works right when it is submerged. Outside of the water, there panic and pain until there’s no more life.

Are you getting it? Every day, you and I can either flop around desperately, going our own way, or we can move with grace and poise in the way God has designed. You can think of that as a choice, I suppose. God will let you flop around on the grass if that’s what you want. But what sense does that make?

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 trust in him and jump in the water. Will you choose life?